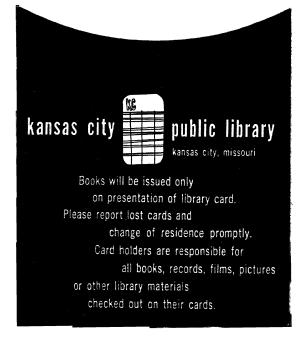
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Few Americans—certainly no American woman—ever had a career as dramatic, as tragic, and yet so heartening to others as Dorothy Dix. She held more secrets than anyone alive, and kept them all. Mail came to her in a fantastic flood, sometimes a thousand letters a day, and her influence became international. Yet here was no gushy sentimentalist, no Whistler's Mother with a typewriter. Dorothy Dix had warm wit, peppered with sharp humor when the occasion arose. Some readers wanted to hang her.

sion arose. Some readers wanted to hang her, others to poison her, because she spoke her mind out of honesty and a complete comprehension of human problems. Many she shocked into different behavior; others she won to new attitudes by words of touching appeal. She counseled some sixty million readers for fifty-five years, yet few of her

poignant as had Dorothy Dix herself.

Born of Southern aristocracy, she married at twenty-two and looked forward to a screne

troubled correspondents had a life story so

at twenty-two and looked forward to a screne existence. Then almost at once she discovered that her husband had an incurable mental difficulty. Their years together would be, at best, precarious and bitter. But for forty

years she remained with him, holding to her vows, trying to better an unhappy situation.

And out of those black hours she fought back acquiring a compassion and a generous

back, acquiring a compassion and a generous understanding of humanity that made her ultimately mother-confessor to a nation.

Here for the first time is her full story . . . the remarkable, hitherto unknown details that could not be told during her lifetime . . . recounted by her friend of twenty years,

Harnett T. Kane, with the help of her longtime confidential sccretary, Ella Bentley Arthur.

Dear Dorothy Dix

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Dear Dorothy Dix, The Story of a Compassionate Woman
IN COLLABORATION WITH ELLA BENTLEY ARTHUR

Dear

Dorothy

Dix

THE STORY OF
A COMPASSIONATE WOMAN

BY HARNETT T. <u>KANE</u> WITH ELLA BENTLEY ARTHUR Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 52-11003

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	7
Part One	
1 "Thoroughbred Colts and Little Negroes"	15
2 "A Dent in My Ego"	27
3 Bedraggled Canary	37
4 Salad for a Sunday Meal	53
5 "Dear Miss—or Mrs.—Dix"	6 ₇
6 The World Took Notice	77
Part Two	
7 Murder!	93
8 New York—New Orleans Shuttle	107
9 Florodora to "Little Italy"	123
10 Gunfire on Madison Square Roof	133
11 Higher up in the World	149
12 Postgraduate Course	167
13 "She's a Momma and Poppa Wrapped in One!"	179
14 The Bell Kept Ringing	195
15 They All Talked to Her	205.
16 "The Next Murder Will Be Yours"	213
Part Thregansas CITY (MO.) PUB	LIC LIBRARY
17 Roses—and a Handful of Thorns 6703524	221
18 Memories Harsh, and Also Happy	231
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6		Contents
19	Fire Bells and Three Farewells	237
20	First Lady of New Orleans	251
21	Flood Crest	257
22	War, and Peace of Mind	267
23	She Saw a World Change	277
24	"Everybody Talking about Love"	285
25	Age and Consolation	295
26	"Worth the Price"	301
AC	KNOWLEDGMENTS	309

INTRODUCTION

Portrait in Compassion

I have been through the depths of poverty and sickness . . . I have known want and struggle and anxiety and despair . . . As I look back upon my life I see it as a battlefield strewn with the wrecks of dead dreams and broken hopes and shattered illusions—a battle in which I always fought with the odds tremendously against me, and which has left me scarred and bruised and maimed and old before my time.

But I have learned to live each day as it comes, and not to borrow trouble by dreading the morrow. It is the dark menace of the picture that makes cowards of us. I put that dread from me because experience has taught me that when the time comes that I so fear, the strength and wisdom to meet it will be given me.

hese were the words of a little, bright-eyed woman who weighed a mere ninety pounds and whose words of advice were read for more than a half century by an estimated sixty million Americans.

They went to Dorothy Dix and her column for help in choices of wives or husbands, guidance in such matters as the naming of a baby, information on how to eat a stuffed avocado or go to bed on a Pullman.

The world brought Miss Dix its secrets; and yet the story of Mrs. Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer—as she was called in private life—was known to only a few intimates. It was more variegated, and in certain ways stranger, than the lives of many of the people about whom she wrote.

This woman who was constantly able to guide others out of personal troubles knew married happiness only briefly. For almost forty years she continued to live with an unbalanced husband, against the advice of her friends. Out of this major problem in her

life came a comprehension of others that was the key to her success

It was an understanding and a sympathy backed up by simple common sense and considerable humor.

Several years ago as she was leaving her New Orleans home, an agitated woman in evening dress rushed into the hallway. "You've got to listen!" she cried, catching Miss Dix's arm. "When you wrote me your advice, I did what you said and it worked. You remember telling me I ought to give him time to get tired of her?"

"Yes," Miss Dix said quietly.

"He did. But now it's another woman. And I'm going to kill her."
Dramatically the caller threw back her head. Less dramatically
Dorothy Dix nodded, showing none of the expected astonishment.
"Why her?" she asked. "Why don't you kill him?"

There followed a silence which Dorothy Dix broke by inviting the woman into her apartment. Over cups of tea she talked the white-faced guest back to composure. There was no double murder, nor even a single one.

But all of Dorothy Dix's cases did not turn out so happily. She once received a letter from a young man which contained this final paragraph: "I cannot cope with the situation any longer. My life is smashed, and I have very little incentive to live. I have found your column wise and kind; I will wait until you answer this in the paper. Advise me, or, as God is my judge, I will put a bullet through my brain. Donald G."

He gave no return address, and Dorothy Dix realized that he expected to read her reply in the next few days, not understanding how long in advance syndicated material must be prepared. With a heavy heart, and a sense of foreboding, she wrote begging him to change his mind, putting her plea ahead of several other columns, to be run at the first possible moment.

Shortly afterward she received this letter: "The boy who signed himself 'Donald G.' was my brother, and he shot himself only three days before your answer appeared. For several weeks he read your column, frantically. We knew he was depressed, but not how badly until it was too late. Had he been able to wait I feel sure it would have saved him; it was the most beautiful thing I ever read. Still, I

know your words to him will save others in the same mood, and for that I can be thankful."

The sister was correct. Miss Dix's appeal to the boy already dead brought dozens of notes over a period of years: "In my dark hour I read your answer to Donald, and it gave me the will to hold on and try again. . . ." "Thank you, Miss Dix. You couldn't have done more for me if you had written me directly." Some readers passed the column from one friend to another, while one man had it reprinted for distribution in his town.

In another vein came a letter which ended with the statement: "I want to make some money quickly. Please send the formula for Coca-Cola." This brought the amused response: "If I had that formula, I wouldn't be writing a column."

A penciled scrawl from a child of eight said: "Mama and Papa won't let me have a dog. Don't you think I ought to?"

"Yes, Bobby," wrote Dorothy Dix. "I do think you should, for a boy without a dog is as forlorn as a dog without a boy."

She had perhaps the greatest audience, year in, year out, of any man or woman of her day, and a career of a more remarkable range than that of any American woman. She occupied a unique role as a kind of oracle, and an arbiter of morals and customs, and she helped set the standards of a shifting social scene.

Dorothy Dix's first writings began in the 1880s, and her life spanned six or seven separate periods of the nation's story. Born at the start of the war between North and South, she grew up through Reconstruction, and reached maturity in the Victorian era; she enjoyed the America of the flush new century, the restless twenties, the two world wars, and their aftermaths.

Her letters mirrored alterations in manners and mores. "When I first started my column," Miss Dix once said, "girls frequently asked, 'Should I help a gentleman on with his coat?' Eventually the question was more likely to be, 'Is it all right for me to spend a week end in Atlantic City with a boy friend?'"

Her column made its debut in 1895, and she wrote it steadily from then until 1950. She preceded the *Katzenjammer Kids* and, in fact, all American comics; hers was the oldest syndicated news-

paper feature—the only one to be carried on by its founder, generation after generation. Many doubted the continuity of her authorship, but it was unbroken. She remained alert until close to the end of her ninety years.

For a long time a theory persisted that there was no real Dorothy Dix, that she was several effusive females of assorted sizes and inclinations. Or that "she" was a corps of rewrite men, grinding out replies to letters picked at random from the pile, shoving the rest into wastebaskets. Or a young sophisticate who, of course, believed nothing of what she wrote.

Yet Dorothy Dix was the same tiny Southern woman who chose her pen name by accident in the 1890s, and maintained her work as a conscientious vocation, decade after decade. She invented Miss Dix; in time Miss Dix became her life, and as Miss Dix she died in New Orleans in December of 1951.

She fooled the world in only one respect. She took advantage of her feminine privilege of remaining silent about her real age—shaving, or letting others shave, ten years off her life. At eighty-five she passed as a mere seventy-five; at eighty-eight, as a juvenile seventy-eight!

Hardly five-feet tall, Dorothy Dix had a strong nose, a small mouth, and black eyes, oddly raised at the corners, which were bright and sharp and penetrating. In her later years she grew stouter, yet remained an almost doll-like figure with a pert wise look—a look which, in one man's words, "always comprehended."

Those who knew of her only through jokes or from her picture in the paper might have considered her a Whistler's Mother with a typewriter. That she was not. Her approach was sharp, realistic. She could be comforting; she could give badly needed reassurance. But she told the truth exactly as it appeared to her.

The ladies, she announced, were frequently wrong or, at least, foolish. Mother definitely was not always right; and she told a country not used to such a view that mother love could sometimes wreck the loved one, and mother as well.

In a way that many did not understand, her counsel was not confined to the lovelorn. For years she served as a sort of information center, answering questions about vocations, personality difficulties,

guidance of children, welfare help. Long before the days of social service workers, she directed thousands, especially in rural areas, to social and medical services which they might not otherwise have found.

A large portion of her readers, and her correspondents, were well-educated people. Men made up a surprisingly high percentage of them, sometimes nearly half. A letter from a priest began: "You also are at a kind of confessional window." A doctor said: "You refer to a certain case. Now I have found . . ." An attorney concluded: "In cases involving civil disputes, I always think . . ."

When the Lynds made their famous sociological study, Middletown, they found Dorothy Dix nearly everywhere in this supposedly typical American community, from beauty-parlor booth to streetcar to pulpit. They said of her column:

"This is perhaps the most potent single agency of diffusion from without, shaping the habits of thought of Middletown in regard to marriage, and possibly represents Middletown's views . . . more completely than any other one available source."

The sun never set on the Dorothy Dix columns. Her writings, which appeared in the United States, Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Newfoundland, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Mexico, and other Latin-American nations, spanned several continents, and she estimated that her collected newspaper writings might have papered a fair part of the world, "though that would have been a silly thing to do with them," she chuckled.

She was astonished at the way her philosophy—essentially Anglo-Saxon—appealed to Spanish-speaking peoples. "You are a great student of mankind," a Guatemalan wrote her. With humility and a twinkle, she quoted a South American who told her that she reminded him of "a wise old mountain goat."

Her professional life started late. Out of a sheltered, isolated country existence, out of domestic despair, she began her career without more than a casual education, without training, and with almost no advance indication of skill. Not until her mid-thirties did she show marked aptitude; not until she approached forty did the country recognize her. At one point it would have seemed that everything was against her—age, background, experience; and

then, as if overnight, everything worked out and she became an American phenomenon.

She was honored, or kidded, in cartoons from Leslie's Weekly, Judge, and the New Yorker, and was saluted, variously, by Ogden Nash, Heywood Broun, Arthur Brisbane, Irvin S. Cobb, and Ernie Pyle. In musical revues, popular songs, poems, and essays "Dear Dorothy Dix" became an American byword.

She never pretended that she was a great writer. She aimed her remarks at the average reader. If her critics called them old stuff, she shrugged and pointed out that many of those remarks came from a book of old stuff, the Bible. When she died, she left an estate of nearly two and a half million dollars. Not many writers, either men or women, of the present century have accumulated so much wealth entirely out of professional earnings. There are indications that she herself did not realize the extent of her possessions.

Through it all the true Dorothy Dix remained largely unknown. Her career, like the woman herself, was a sum of many contradictions; the truth, as often happens, was more remarkable than the legends.

Part One

I stood yesterday. I can stand today. And I will not permit myself to think about what might happen tomorrow.

Dorothy Dix

"Thoroughbred Colts and Little Negroes"

May 24, 1863. My dear little Lizzie: If you should be deprived of your natural guardian and protector by the untimely hand of death . . . Remember, my dear little one, that it is your poor father's last word to you to honor, love and obey your mother in all things. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth that thy days may be long in the land." Remember that 'tis better to give to the unworthy than to withhold your aid from objects of true charity. Goodbye, my dear little baby. May God bless and watch over you is the prayer of your affectionate father.

ean, easy-going William Douglas Meriwether wrote this in what he feared might be a final message to his only child, Elizabeth. Going into the war against the North, which had already taken his only brother, he prepared himself for the worst. But not long afterward he came back home, to live to a blithe ninety-fourth year as patriarch of an enlarging household.

He might have felt even greater concern about the year-and-a-half-old girl herself. Several times Elizabeth's life had seemed to slip away. Born prematurely, she lay listless in the doctor's hands until he ordered strenuous efforts to warm and save the fragile bit of humanity.

In those days, before incubators, the women of the thickly forested Kentucky and Tennessee estate ran to gather bottles, heat bricks, and cover them with cloth to protect the scrawny baby on the side bed. "She looked like a sick bird, before the feathers had time to start," a relative recalled. "Hands like wax, the size of a quarter piece." In this race-horse country not many

would have given odds on the survival of the Meriwethers' young one.

The mother was not strong. Some of the family who glanced inside the tent of warmth, now shook their heads. With such a one, perhaps it would be best. . . . Then, as she was to do many times later, Elizabeth clenched those narrow hands and fought back. She gained a half pound, a pound. Bottles and bricks could be removed. Still she remained an odd little object, a family sport. When would she ever grow?

Soon after her first birthday Lizzie needed shoes, and in those straitened times leather was hard to come by. In any case, shoes to fit feet like hers were rare. So Will Meriwether went to the woods and shot a squirrel. Laboriously he fashioned the single skin (no more was needed) into a pair of boots for her, the soft hair inside for warmth.

By then Will, always amiable, inclined to worry over nothing, faced his own decision about the war that spread ever more darkly over the rich lands of Tennessee and Kentucky.

Seven months before Elizabeth's birth South Carolina, with the firing on Fort Sumter, had thrust the South into conflict; among the first sounds she heard was the thump of men marching along country roads. The Meriwethers' Woodstock farm lay near a border area, divided between slaveholders and small farmers who wanted nothing to do with bondage. Raiding parties swept down to commandeer or steal what they could; each time the Meriwethers found themselves poorer, their tempers shorter. Will sympathized with the Confederacy. A sickly youth, he "enjoyed delicate health" in his mid-twenties; but as things turned worse for the South in the summer of 1863, he offered his services and wrote his daughter the letter of farewell.

His impulse proved stronger than his constitution. Arrived at the scene, he fell seriously ill and had to be sent home to recover. Like father, like daughter. Throughout her life Elizabeth was to fight sickness, a procession of ailments over which she always won a victory. "We Meriwethers often have to see the doctor, but we go on forever," she explained. "When they're ready to put me away, they'll first have to knock me on the head."

For a time both Kentucky and Tennessee claimed her birth. Woodstock's big house lay in Todd County, in the Bluegrass State, with the overseer's or guest house, over in Montgomery County, Tennessee. Shortly before her birth on November 18, 1861, the family began repairs in the main building. Everyone went to the small house across the line, and thus Tennessee got the future Dorothy Dix.

The period of her birth permitted her to boast for years, with a smile, that she was the only person in almost any group who had had a slave. When word of her arrival spread around the country-side, a relative sent a black girl to Woodstock, to be Lizzie's servant-companion, in the style of the times. She did not have the girl for long; already slavery was disappearing.

The family ranked well in the South. The Meriwethers, kin to Meriwether Lewis, the famous American explorer, had roots in England, Scotland, and Wales. Under Charles II, who insisted on strict religious orthodoxy—at least for others—three Meriwether sons moved about 1680 from Wales to the freer air of the Old Dominion across the sea. There their father had an extensive grant extending about Albemarle and New Kent counties and a great distance into the West.

Some of the Meriwethers stayed in Virginia; others pushed to newer country. As one observer described the clan, "most of them were peculiar in manner and habits; low and stout in stature, with round heads, dark complexions and bright, hazel eyes." They also impressed outsiders as economical, hard-working, and hard-willed. A Meriwether generally got what he went out for.

A highly valuable Kilmarnock volume of Robert Burns's poems tells, by successive inscriptions, something of the family's movements. "Parson Will" Douglas, who migrated to Virginia, selected the book as a present for his daughter Peggy. To her and her husband, Nicholas Meriwether, Parson Douglas handed the volume, with the inscription: "Quite good, for a Scotsman."

Later the husband and wife set another name below this notation, that of son Charles. Leaving Albemarle County to study medicine in Edinburgh, Charles practiced there for a time, then in Virginia, and eventually moved to Kentucky, to take up resi-

dence in the blooming tobacco and race-horse country. He gave his name to Meriville and also established Woodstock. In some parts of the South the estate might have been called a plantation; to Kentuckians and Tennesseans it would be a farm—all 800 acres of it. His various properties totaled 4300 acres.

In due time the next Charles Meriwether married Caroline Barker, and with the Burns book went a large part of Woodstock itself and fifty Negro men. Not to be outdone, Caroline's father offered twenty young Negro women; but the Barkers were less well-to-do, and the Meriwethers accepted only a few of the women. In any event, the offer had been made. It was a day and place of the gallant gesture.

With his new force young Charles put up a fair brick house. As the story goes, its construction "cost three crops and five years of labor," with lumber from home woods and light pink brick molded on the spot. The year was 1830. As things improved, he added rooms to make a sprawling establishment, including a ballroom in which his children could entertain the countryside. The slaves now numbered a hundred; they planted oaks which matured into magnificent trees, their gnarled limbs against the sky. As a final touch of elegance, Charles fenced in a tract for his own deer park. Let Albemarle County match that, sir!

Then, again in proper time, the Burns book was transferred to Will Meriwether, who ultimately would pass it to Lizzie herself. Thus the girl's setting—property, tradition. Yet time was against her and the Meriwethers. She grew up to uncertainty, shifting economics, and, after a few years, shifting homes.

Her sickly mother, Maria Winston, had two other children, Mary and Edward, and with them young Lizzie played around the bed or the cot on which Maria spent most of her time. Years later Elizabeth wrote Mary: "Ma died when we were too young to take anyone seriously, and besides she had been sick ever since we could remember, so she really had no part in our lives." Elizabeth remembered more clearly her grandmothers Winston and Barker.

Grandma Winston had a quick tongue, and also the habit of fretting, but Lizzie Meriwether was fond of her. She divided her family into two kinds—"those that are sure everything is for the best in the world, and those that know we're all going to starve to death." For the most part, Lizzie herself was an optimist. On the other hand, "It took Grandma Winston to do a really expert chore of worrying. I'll never forget what she said to me one day when I had just about every misery anybody could invent and yet was as chirpy as a cricket. She looked at me with pity and scorn: 'I don't believe you know when you're bad off; you haven't got that much sense.'"

But imposing Grandma Barker impressed the young girl more. This grandma stood about six-feet high, "not fat, just big," was stately in appearance, and had fine blond hair. A woman of intellect, a great reader, she impressed Lizzie as "the most philosophical person I ever knew." . . . "She took life's ups and downs most calmly." As for Grandpa Barker, Lizzie thought he must have been "a pretty hard old gent to live with . . . opinionated and set in his ways."

Rather more like Grandma Barker was Lizzie's father, Will, "very sweet-tempered," a teller of yarns and tall tales, retailer of race-horse episodes, a man with an eye on great future prospects. The present might not work out well—Will's fortunes constantly changed, now heading high up, now sinking slowly down—but the days to come would be fine! Wait and see; and Will was always ready to wait.

Among Elizabeth's first recollections were daily walks at sunset, when towering Grandma Barker gathered the children around her; then she told them tales from history, reciting Scott and Byron. At other hours of the day Grandma had the domestic management of her farm, which she had to "run like a free hotel."

Whole families of relatives and acquaintances would arrive in a body, to visit for weeks in the easy Southern fashion. Thus Grandma Barker had to be a "commissary general," providing food for servants, family, and callers; under her supervision the staff processed flour, meal, meats, and vegetables. They also sheared Woodstock's sheep and sent wool to the mill to be woven into blankets and bolts of cloth.

Recalling this, the grown-up Elizabeth wrote: "Until I was ten or twelve, I never had a winter dress that wasn't a red and black linsey cut off the communal belt, or stockings that weren't knit from the wool of our own sheep." To her last days she remembered piles of blankets from the mill, stiff as boards; children, as well as servants, went to work with currycombs, struggling "until we brought up the nap and made them soft and fleecy."

Years earlier Grandpa had bought Grandma Barker the first sewing machine in that part of the country; she cut out the servants' garments but taught the Negro women to use the machine for clothes intended for the quarters. Outsiders might think plantation ways leisured or romantic, but Elizabeth knew "a hard, useful and laborious life." And while Grandma could be regarded as one of the grandees, the girl heard her say that Mr. Lincoln had done more than set the slaves free; he "also liberated the white women of the South." Many of the freed Woodstock blacks remained on or about the place, but greater changes were in the making.

All around Woodstock stretched the farms of relatives—other Meriwethers, Barkers, Minors, Hunts, Gilmers. Generations earlier, occasional pairs of brothers had married pairs of sisters, and interconnections were many, varied, and often confusing. Almost everybody for miles about appeared related to everyone else. There were no large towns near by, and the area, Elizabeth once said, was "isolated as a desert." Most visitors came only short distances, for roads were rutted—rocky dust piles in dry weather, hopeless bogs on wet days, and all but impassable between times.

For years the Meriwethers had sent their tobacco on a long down-river trip by flatboat to New Orleans, to be sold in that roaring "foreign" metropolis, as remote as Paris itself. On the proceeds depended family well-being for the next twelve months. The young Meriwethers could judge prosperity in a moment's calculation. Once Grandpa Barker gave Grandma a wondrous leghorn bonnet "that cost as much as a hogshead of tobacco!" And back from New Orleans rode the boys with stores of sugar, fine cheeses, and imported items, though such quality stuff appeared less and less often in the postwar days of Elizabeth's childhood.

In earlier years the Woodstock stables had a certain fame, with lines of thoroughbreds filling the paddocks. Grandfather Charles Meriwether, with General Harding of Belle Meade, once bought a horse from England—Ambassador, a superb stallion costing a reported \$25,000, to head their stud. One of the first, if not the first, to run a futurity race in this country, Ambassador had been a glamorous figure.

Now, however, he and most of the others were gone—taken in the war, or given away when the men went off to fight. One of the last, Elizabeth remembered, was a retired race horse who served as her own nursemaid. Fraxinella was a gentle old thing, now too fat, too advanced in years, to be of real service. When Elizabeth could barely toddle about the big yard, she was placed on Fraxinella's back, and the mare left free to graze on the bluegrass. "Every now and then she would rake me off as she passed under the limb of a tree or a clothesline, and my wailing would summon a grownup, who would put me again on the broad back."

Only later did Lizzie understand that the aging Fraxinella had been a celebrity of the South, who had made history when she ran twenty miles in one afternoon. These were the days of four-mile runs, "instead of the piddling furlongs of today." The contest went to the best out of three runs; in two cases dead heats resulted, and had to be run over again. The sturdy Fraxinella lived on through Lizzie's early years, dying at twenty-nine. And as a young girl Elizabeth could call off racing records as other children talked of marble games.

Since Ma Meriwether was ailing, Lizzie found herself much on her own. With sister Mary and her brother Charles Edward, or Ed, and assorted Meriwethers behind her, Lizzie explored the country, "riding anything we could get a bridle on, or any kind of saddle, going always at breakneck speed with our yelping pack behind us." Eventually she wrote a niece: "As I knew how to ride before I did to walk, I can never get over being surprised at people having to take lessons before they tackle a horse."

A tomboy of a sort, she directed the others in tracing animal tracks through the woods, and hunted places where the best nuts fell in autumn, where the earliest spring flowers carpeted little valleys. From these days in open field and along sloping hill, she developed a feeling for nature that she would never lose. She could vividly describe a forest with bands of sunlight among the shadowed

trees, the delicate drops of water clinging to wisteria tendrils after a rain, the sloping flight of red birds against the distant sky. From this early kinship with the countryside, too, she probably acquired her aversion to cut flowers and blossoms pinned at the shoulder. "The place for growing things is in the earth, roots down. I don't like anything with its feet chopped off."

Once she stated: "I grew up with thoroughbred colts and little Negroes, the two things I really understand." All her life she quoted the wisdom of the colored people. And her conversation and writings were eloquent of the racing stable—the man who walked like a spavined old mare, the girl with the grace of a sportive filly.

The future marriage counselor had frequent childhood glimpses of those troubled in love. As the Kentucky-Tennessee line ran through the farm and Kentucky marriage laws were more strict than Tennessee's, couples from Kentucky sometimes dashed through the Meriwether property headed for Tennessee and an open-air wedding. "One of the amusements of my childhood," she said, "was to assist, in the French sense, at the marriages of eloping couples whose nuptials took place under a wild cherry tree about half a mile on the Tennessee side. By what occult sense we children scented orange blossoms I do not know, but when we would see a youth and maiden come lickety-split down the road in a buggy followed by another buggy, also hard-driven, we would shriek 'Runaway, runaway!' and breathlessly pursue them to the altar . . ."

Discipline tended to be negligible, except for Mammy, black and firm, whose authority was limited to the house itself. "We were left to develop ourselves . . . thrown on our own resources and expected to get ourselves out of trouble if we got into it. We were taught to fear God, speak the truth, and that gentlefolk didn't whine; and then nature was permitted to take its course."

At table, however, Mammy stood behind Lizzie, Mary, and Ed, and watched for the first lapse in etiquette. Down would fall "the hardest and boniest knuckles that any human being ever possessed." And with a thump on their heads, she would mutter: "Mind yo' manners. Anybody would think yo' was po' white."

It was an admonition not to be disregarded, "for the one person of whom we stood in awe and fear was Mammy." Mammy also presided over the quinine bottle in malaria days, mixing the medicine with peach jelly, and serving each dose with a big silver spoon.

. . . Lizzie had kinder memories of Mammy, and told of the way the magnificent old woman went about, fussing furiously, then slipping little cakes to her. And Mammy's bosom would always be "the tenderest pillow on which childhood ever wept itself to sleep."

The tiny Lizzie, vivid, emphatic, continued to lead the others in play. Her pet was baby Ed, to whom she gave a tomboy's kindly direction; their bond was to strengthen with the years. Sister Mary, gentle, pretty, tended to acquiesce in everything until the game became too rough, when she retreated into sniffles. Though Lizzie would always look at Mary with eyes of loving kindness, she could sometimes speak vigorously of the power of tears.

Even then Elizabeth Meriwether showed a remarkable fondness for children, rounding up cousins and second cousins to join them. When they fell, she picked them up and nursed back their composure. "She was a kind of assistant mother to half the young ones around us," a relative remembered. Already an adventurous spirit, she told them of her plans to travel over the world, to see the places that Grandma Barker described on those exciting walks in the afternoon. At the same time Lizzie had begun to write bits of poems, fragments of description that the others barely noticed. "Ever since I was big enough to hold a pencil, my chief diversion has been scribbling," she said.

In time she put down, in affectionate detail, the Woodstock she recalled, with its irregular galleries, its side and back wings. "It belongs to no known school of architecture," she said later, "but it singularly represents the man who built it—handsome, sturdy, comfortable and generous, nothing for show or pretense, built to stand the storms, the heat of sun and cold of winters without a tremor, even as he stood foursquare against the winds of fate."

She remembered particularly the big dining room. "All my life it has seemed to me that there never was so delightful a room." Long, narrow, it had slits of windows, so shaded on one side by black-green cedar trees that the room lay half in shadow. Beyond the windows on the other side rolled the fields, with a pond in the middle like a silver shield.

Across the end of the room was a fireplace, "with a broad, flagged hearth and a mantle shelf set high above all possible depredations of childish curiosity."

Against the opposite wall stood a long mahogany sideboard, ageblackened, its polished wood a dusky mirror in which the flames reflected grotesquely, "now dying down to a tremulous glow in the dark panel of a door, now catching a silvery radiance from the long lines of racing cups on the upper shelf, or giving out prismatic gleams from the heavy glass decanters."

Here at twilight Elizabeth's mind created pictures, "peopling the room with the fantastic shadows that dreams are made of." Into the room at such hours walked Jeff with a heavy "turn" of wood. As a boy jockey, the dark Jeff had ridden many of Woodstock's most famous mounts. Growing heavy, he had become head groom, to rule for years in glory as oracle and unquestioned authority on matters of the turf. Now, his hands knotty, hair white, coat patched, Jeff had the look of "those who dwell in the past and for whom the future has neither hope nor promise."

She told how, as she watched one day, Jeff went to the sideboard and touched, one by one, the rows of silver cups and goblets that he had helped win for Woodstock. She thought them his fetishes, "visible idols that represented all the happy past," and he did not need inscriptions, which he could hardly have read in any case, to tell him on what course or at which fair Autocrat and Miss Wilkins, Fraxinella and Surprise, had taken them.

On Sundays, Lizzie dressed primly and went to church. The Meriwethers of this generation were Baptists, but perhaps because of the family's tolerant Virginia background or its Kentucky connections, they did not share some of the Tennessee neighbors' rejection of good liquors. For all her life the girl who became Dorothy Dix wondered at the rigid teetotalers, zealots who, because they did not drink themselves, would deny others the right to drink.

She quoted at times, approvingly, the philosophy of old Jeff about toddies, "sperrits," and such. Jeff simply paraphrased the good book: "Take a little for the stomach's sake." People had the same kind of stomachs in his day that others had in the olden

days, Jeff figured, and those stomachs sometimes "needed comfortin' powerfully."

By now Lizzie had acquired another attitude that she would never lose—a strong "Meriwether feeling." A Meriwether, a Barker, a Gilmer, or one of the other connections . . . they had first call on her affections, first demand on her conscience. Few of the clan felt loyalty so thoroughly, so warmly. In these days of the 1870s, as before the war, relations married relations. Over Cloverfields, Eupidon, Meriville, and the other properties, ties of blood steadily thickened.

"It was not a matter of snobbery, of Meriwethers wishing to speak only to Barkers or Minors, and the Barkers or Minors to God," a descendant explains. "But uncles and cousins were practically the only people you met. Who else would there be to speak to, unless you made a long trip outside?"

By now, also, Elizabeth Meriwether was beginning to understand the fast-growing changes in the Meriwether situation. As the "new poor" of the South, they met wealth and need in the same day. Fortunately, however, the good old house had been saved; and they dined off the same ancient mahogany table, with silver that they had never lost.

The silver itself had a story. Dick, one of the servants who continued at Woodstock, had saved it from raiders during the war by hiding it inside a tomb in the Meriwether burying ground. "Hants" had guarded the pieces, he insisted. Now, washed and polished, the pieces once more served the living. (Dick was sometimes known as "Mr. Dicks." His wife added the s and used the full salutation.)

"At Woodstock we feasted like Lucullus," Elizabeth noted, "for my grandmother was a notable housekeeper and a cordon bleu cook." That fat land teemed with good things; "even peacocks were familiar birds upon our tables." Nevertheless, the Meriwethers had almost no cash; whatever they received had to be turned back to the estate in an effort to slow the tide of deterioration, mend fences, repair the roof, and pay the taxes that had piled up.

By now the baby slippers of squirrel fur had given way to shoes

with copper toes, to lessen the damage resulting from active life. Any toys that the children wanted had to be made on the farm, like everything else. With "bought things" such a rarity, a great day arrived when, by an unexpected windfall, her father broke the joyous news: she and Mary could each buy a doll from the nearest country store. Not a big one, but still a doll. Sixty years later, after she had acquired the identity of Dorothy Dix and the rank of a millionaire, she could still recite the details of that incident.

Even in such straitened days, the matter of education had to be considered. The tired mother and overworked grandmother managed a bit of elementary training, and that was all. Pinched finances made attendance at school an impossibility. What the Meriwethers would have done about the matter, Elizabeth never knew; fate, or unexpected luck, intruded at that moment, as it often would for her, in the person of a caller who helped mold her life.

CHAPTER 2

"A Dent in My Ego"

e was a pathetic character—stooped, whiskery, and a trifle "peculiar." He frequently talked to himself, and if he spoke to others, they scratched their heads at times and said they could not guess what he was talking about. But he had a courtly style and good manners, and he was a family connection with a claim on the Meriwethers. That, of course, meant a great deal.

On his arrival he mentioned, vaguely, a destination in the West. He asked if he might stay a day or two, and expansive Will Douglas Meriwether, happy to receive any visitor, welcomed him. The old man remained as long as the Meriwethers were at Woodstock.

As he moved about the house, he paid scant attention to the children, at least at first. Then he began to notice round-faced Elizabeth, with her tiny eyes, her breathless way of speaking, her look of eager interest. A contemporary pictured the Lizzie of this period as being "like a plain sparrow, her head slightly to the side, asking the world 'What about it?'"

As the new guest began to ask questions, the girl's replies to his

gruff queries intrigued him. He took her hand, and soon he was opening to her a wide new world of the mind. Whatever others thought or said of him, he had a brilliant educational background, the result of years of university training and years of continued study.

He counseled her on her reading, corrected her vocabulary, cautioned her on the pronunciation of names. Then he took down a leather-bound book of history, and set before her pictures of an oriental palace, a description of an American Revolutionary battle. At his side she discovered, for the first time, the contents of the fine Meriwether library established two generations earlier, and slowly she came to understand that here was a treasure.

"I had no mushy children's books to read," she said afterward, "and so I cut my teeth on the solid meat of good literature, for which mercy I thank God." By the time she reached eleven, she knew Shakespeare; she could repeat passages out of Scott, following up an interest in Sir Walter begun by Grandma Barker; and she had made a joyous acquaintance, which she never slighted, with Charles Dickens.

In the words of a later friend, "Nobody could spend a few hours with her, without hearing something about a Dickens character. This one reminded her of Barkis, who was 'willin',' and that one of what the medical students said at their party when the landlady screamed at them. Sometimes I felt ashamed I knew so little, and I went home to read up!"

Elizabeth herself recalled: "Before I was twelve . . . I had read Smollett and Fielding and Richardson, had even toyed with the works of Josephus and Motley's Dutch Republic, and other airy little trifles." There had been earlier Meriwethers of intellect; none leaped with more delight into the ocean of good writing. When brother and sister or cousin giggled at the strange old man who guided her, she frowned; if they went too far, she stormed and ordered them away, then hurried back to her books.

The tomboy had turned into a bookworm, though an undiscriminating one. Sometimes she quoted disconcertingly to over-Puritanical friends. "If you knew all, you could forgive all," she would say, while a visiting Gilmer blinked. Or, worse, she would

nod brightly: "You know, I agree with the man who said a coat that fits in the back is more morally sustaining than the strongest religious theory!"

By now, of course, she knew, as did others around her, that she would never be a beauty, or even pretty; "interesting," yes . . . if young men might become interested in so narrow-chested a little thing. "I was always a half-portion sort of person," she would say in later years, and now and then she admitted she had suffered moments of unhappiness among handsomer girls. A friend, striving for a compliment, could only call her "compact," which is not a word to be treasured by a girl.

Lizzie had an awkward walk. In later years skirts, bustled or unbustled, would tend to conceal it; but in early girlhood it was clear that her legs had a slight bow. As Dorothy Dix, she would one day pass a letter to a secretary, with a suggestion of a smile: "You'd better tell this woman what to do about bandy legs. I'm a bit that way, myself!" To a child, however, the problem was not humorous.

As Lizzie's father went about his duties at Woodstock, she was frequently at his side. He had helped save her from death at birth; for her he had special feelings of admiration and protection, emotions which she returned in her own fashion. Will Douglas Meriwether had an interest in almost everything, and an opinion to match his interest, and she listened earnestly as they walked together. She knew before many of the others that they were drawing toward the end of their stay at this home she never forgot.

The day came when the financial burden proved too heavy, and this branch of the Meriwethers had to move. They settled at Olmsted—another family property some fifty miles away in Kentucky, a more modest place, with still fewer potentialities. Within a year or two they shifted again, to the town of Clarksville, Tennessee, where Lizzie spent her adolescent years. In the process of transfer she lost her literary mentor, but not the tastes he had helped create within her, nor her affectionate memory of him.

In her mind, too, there remained a picture of Woodstock's mellowed interior, the heavy mahogany furniture, the long parlor sofas, and the hallways with their cracked oil portraits. For years, setting up her own household in one place after another, she hunted pieces

of furniture that had a certain resemblance to those she remembered from her childhood.

Her long-ailing mother died, and after a time there arrived a substitute—pretty, hard-working Martha Gilmer Chase, Widow Chase, a cousin whom Will Meriwether had known for years. Mattie Gilmer, an adaptable and high-spirited woman, understood what was required of a good stepmother. Between her and young Lizzie there grew a friendship that strengthened with the years.

At this period, however, Elizabeth overheard an accidental remark, which had a deep effect. Her stepmother, thinking that there were no young people about, complimented the handsomer sister, Mary. Then Lizzie's name was brought into the conversation, but Mattie made no comment.

The earlier, undisciplined days ended; there were no more careless rides, no races through the woods with dogs and children at her heels. The new mother proved a stern churchgoer—two Sunday morning services, Sunday night meetings, week-day meetings, special meetings . . . "We went every time someone opened one of the doors," Lizzie said. She missed a few sessions; after that she went regularly. The new Mrs. Meriwether had her firm side.

From this, as in other matters, Elizabeth could extract the humorous element. At eighty, she wrote sympathetically of young friends who called on her in North Carolina after church. They left after a short time, because, as she well understood, "There's nothing like a long sermon to increase the appetite."

School was a new hardship. The Female Academy of Clarksville was just what it sounded like—well-meaning, genteel, and not quite adequate. Teachers were the Miss Annas and the Miss Marys, whose claims to their positions lay, at least in part, in the fact that Papa had died a hero under General Bragg or in the Mississippi campaigns. Lizzie decided that she had learned more from her ancient friend at home. Here she received "a thin smattering of all the ologies and isms," while she frequently surprised her teachers with her curious, if disorganized, knowledge.

But at the Female Academy she discovered an interest greater than her schoolwork, in which, she admitted, she did not particularly distinguish herself. In her own leisure time she wrote—stories, essays, and accounts of funny incidents. When she presented her first composition, "The Pleasures of Anticipation," her instructors were pleased. Though not quite polished, it had great promise, they told the family. Lizzie herself tossed the thing aside, remembering it only as high-flown trivia. "It was a bird," she smiled.

Perhaps it was because of her adult reading at home, perhaps because of the breadth of her interests; but school exercises left her steadily bored. Newspapers, however, were another matter—by the time she was fifteen she was putting out her own private newspaper, making herself "proprietor, editor, contributor, compositor and sole subscriber," to the great detriment of her marks.

Whatever her class standing, she enjoyed almost nothing so much as the writing of "compositions." When a schoolmate was uninspired, Lizzie willingly dashed one off for her. This process continued for more than a year, until the teachers, seeing a queer similarity in all the essays, intervened. They were probably the first people outside the Meriwether household to note the girl's phenomenal energy.

In her early teens Elizabeth gave evidence of growing determination and courage. One night the family woke to Lizzie's cries for assistance. They found a man cowering before the young girl, who had him covered with a gun. He had broken in to burglarize the house. Hearing him, she had run, not for her father, but for his pistol. Only after cornering the intruder had she cried out.

About this time, too, Elizabeth decided what she liked in hats—perky ones, bright, flowered or feathered or beribboned, and, above all, red. When she felt in a low mood the color sent her spirits soaring, she said. "And even when I don't actually need it, I just like it," she explained. A relative observed: "If we were looking down the street and made out a red glow in the distance, we knew she was coming."

In these years her good-natured father had developed his own defenses against fortune. In Clarksville he started the first of a series of enterprises, a plant for the manufacture of plows, to be succeeded in time by a tobacco commission company. The townspeople liked Will Meriwether; they enjoyed sitting down with him

to swap stories and hear him tell of his great future projects, which would change his destiny and his family's.

One day Will led the rest of the clan to the June exercises at which Lizzie was graduated, at sixteen, in all of the Academy's ologies and isms "and in a love of a dress." A reporter for the Clarksville paper favored his readers with a full account, opening with the moment when "twelve young ladies made their appearance on the platform, all dressed in calico. This was a happy innovation; the dresses were in good taste and fitted well, and the young probationers looked very much better than they would have done if they had been encouraged to vie with one another in all the fashionable frippery of the day."

There followed the "time-honored practice of reading essays by the graduating class," which led the correspondent to comment upon a "very marked improvement in elocution since last year." Also, the girls spoke more clearly than before, "though occasionally some members of the audience insisted upon talking louder than the essayists."

Miss Willie Valiant had chosen for a subject "The Age," discussing all current improvements, closing gracefully with the era's "crowning honor, the homage it pays to woman as the queen of home, sovereign of the rising generation." Miss Mattie Beach philosophized upon "The Ruins of Time," others on "Hereafter" and "Life Is What You Make It," generally with beaming optimism.

For Miss Lizzie Meriwether, however, there would be no such girlish eulogies. Her "In the Market," said the reporter, was "not so complimentary to the present age . . . a trenchant satire on the universal dominion of the almighty dollar, for which everything may be bought—honor and love, lawyers, politicians and young ladies. Exceptions were made, however, in favor of Lee and Jackson, who were quoted as above price. The elocution of this young lady was generally remarked as admirable." Nevertheless it is clear that Miss Meriwether's unconventional observations had disturbed some traditionalists.

In the winter the newspaper notes had special interest for the Meriwethers. After telling how Susie B. Wright, "a charming belle of Trigg County," was visiting her sister, and how "Messrs. Gus

and Tank Covington of Fort Worth, Texas, two of Clarksville's noble boys," returned on Christmas night, the paper added that Miss Lizzie had left for Botetourt Springs, Virginia, "where she will enter Hollins Institute for a six months' review. Miss Lizzie possesses a brilliant intellect, and we dare say there will be no brighter star in that old institution. Her many friends would read with lively interest a pen description of the grand old mountain scenery that surrounds the beautiful place, which, we hope, she will give us."

The correspondent failed to receive such a pen description. For the next few months would be, to Elizabeth Meriwether, one of the bleakest phases of her life; years were to pass before she could write of it without hurt. Will Meriwether, thinking to favor his daughter, made a series of mistakes in sending her alone to meet an unimpressed world.

This country girl—so small that strangers regarded her as a child—had never been as much as a hundred miles from home, in fact had gone only once to the town of Nashville. As for a sleeping car, she had never seen one. The trip from Clarksville became an agony of uncertainty and embarrassment. What to do, how to act? It was far worse than handling a burglar at night.

When at last, bedraggled and frightened, she stepped out of the carriage at select Hollins Institute, she blinked, and Hollins blinked back. After she gave her name and explained her purpose, the officials stared at her blankly. "My father hadn't even written the school I was coming, or made any arrangements for me, so nobody knew who I was or where I came from. . . . They just looked down their noses at me, and didn't know what to do with me."

It was a cold January, with more snow than she had ever seen. Decades later, she still felt her chill and alarm. "Finally they decided I didn't look dangerous and let me stay, but they never did get over thinking I was some sort of a stray animal."

She seemed so different that, to the juvenile minds of her fellow students, she was outlandish. Whatever Tennessee and Kentucky thought of the Meriwethers, she stood out as "country," with ways that branded her, to the Virginians, as unsophisticated. She dressed plainly, in sturdy, unfashionable frocks, and she wore pigtails. She heard, as she confided years later, words like "runt," "yokel," and "upstart." Not even the reddest of hats could wipe out the memory. It was of this period that Elizabeth Meriwether was thinking when, many years later, she told a secretary that she could sympathize with her in a devastating situation: "You know, I had an early dent in my ego."

"I cried and cried," she reminisced, "enough tears to raise the water level in the ocean. . . . I thought I would die of homesickness." Yet she got over that phase. "I was cured and I have never had another attack." She came to know the Cocke family, in charge of Hollins, and others who had the insight to see beneath the unprepossessing exterior of the tiny girl with the unconventional looks.

Still, she found scant joy in being in the fashionable school, with its hilly campus and wooded vistas. Beside her "fat and goodnatured" roommate, she crouched sadly near a window through which the wind whistled until they had stuffed all their worn stockings between the sashes.

Inevitably, as the months went by, she said she "wished herself" on the college paper, as a contributor. One of the editors suggested that she try for the annual composition medal, but Lizzie shook her head. She had managed to do well enough in class, taking some junior and some senior subjects; yet the judges set a high literary standard for the competition, and she knew she had no chance.

"So that was that until, happening to pass through a hall one day," she related, "I heard a girl say to one of the teachers something about that little Meriwether girl competing for the prize." The teacher sneered: "Why, that little snip? The idea is absurd!"

That settled Lizzie Meriwether, all ninety pounds of her. She would win the medal, or break apart in the effort. For the balance of the term, while the fat roommate stared, she wrote, rewrote, and rewrote again, producing "an opus which bore the romantic title of 'Night Brings out the Stars,'" a phenomenon to which she gave her approval. In the spring she reddened in surprise and delight—a surprise shared by others, including at least one teacher—when she took the award.

It was this medal that really began her writing career, "the turn-

ing point of my life." Her prize packed carefully in her bags, she went home to Tennessee. In her brief stay at Hollins and her terms at the Female Academy, as she conceded later, her education had been "rather sparse . . . one of those omelette soufflé things, principally flubdub. It had a taste of everything, but, oh, such a little of it." In the fall Lizzie Meriwether did not re-enroll at Hollins. A new man had come to the house at Clarksville, and ahead lay another turning point.

CHAPTER 3

Bedraggled Canary

efore settling down at home, Elizabeth found a small treat waiting for her. She had always talked of travel, and now she was to go on a trip, the second long one she had ever taken—to Illinois for a visit with the Gilmers, her stepmother's family. For Lizzie Meriwether there was the excitement of a slow journey to towns of which she had never heard, and, as everybody understood, the chance to meet other young women and, more important, other young men.

Mattie Gilmer's family had, like the Meriwethers, settled in Virginia, then moved on to the West. In a more or less "Southern-spirited" part of Illinois, at Quincy, the Gilmers did well. Mattie's grandfather and father became medical men, general practitioners in their Illinois town and countryside.

But it was another, younger Gilmer who would concern Lizzie. George, her stepmother's brother, was ten years her senior, and a man with an obviously romantic background. Since her father's remarriage, the girl had heard a great deal about George. In the comfortable Gilmer house in Quincy, he walked about with ease—

to the plain teen-ager a rather mysterious figure, with a quizzical look on his handsome face.

Tall and well built, George had sharp-cut features, bland eyes, dark hair, and an impeccable pair of long mustaches; he had an "air" to match his well-cut suits with their narrow trousers and rather colorful vests. A man of several enthusiasms, George talked dramatically, when he wished, of businesses in the offing and investments and enterprises at his finger tips. Again he sat silent, arms carelessly folded, and those around let it be known that he had "come onto" something. In time George would become a financial figure; they'd all see. The matter had something to do with inventions, though Lizzie could not be sure of the details.

George had had adventures, too. Years earlier, through a family friend, he had obtained a job in the Indian territory, at a remote Western post. There he met important chiefs, tribal figures, and Buffalo Bill Cody himself. These names had a romantic glitter, and George Gilmer could tell stirring stories of raids, Indians on the warpath, captures in the desert.

George and one or two friends on duty at the post were among the first to get a hint of the Custer massacre, as Lizzie was told. A band of red men slipped into the stockade late of an evening, not to rob but to leave a great many horses behind. In the morning the whites noticed that most of the animals had a United States brand. Why would Indians want to rid themselves of horses? George started inquiries, and the bloody truth of the famous last stand came out.

George had other intriguing tales. By the standards of the day he had traveled a great deal, to New York and Chicago, and to the new industrial town that people were talking about, Detroit. His enterprises had a flavor of the unknown, and Elizabeth listened with bright interest and asked many questions. Yet, then at least, no romantic spark developed between the two. In the somewhat confused interconnections of the Meriwethers, George and her father were first cousins, Elizabeth's Grandma Barker having been a sister to George's mother. Thus he and Elizabeth were second cousins, or, as genealogists might put it, first cousins once removed.

In any case George left on another of his trips, and she stayed

briefly at Quincy, getting further acquainted with the family. A Gilmer nephew, younger than Elizabeth, has a clear recollection of the girl of that day, with her inquisitive eyes, her slightly awkward walk, and her laughter that rang out frequently.

"She read all the time—books, magazines, anything, and she talked about what she read. From a popular novel that appeared in a magazine, she recited passages, explaining the French words." He recalled, too, that older boys occasionally took Lizzie riding with a girl cousin, and one or two fast, rakish rigs came and went during her stay. Yet neither in Quincy nor in Clarksville was Lizzie an overwhelming success with the young men.

Women could testify that she did not dress well; even for a country girl, she showed scant knowledge of style or materials. Another man of that day thought that she was costumed "as if she'd always put on her things in a hurry." Elizabeth Meriwether had other matters on her mind.

Still, she had an eminently domestic nature. As always, she loved children, and in her words: "I am a woman born out of my time. I should have been the chatelaine of a medieval castle, and sat with jingling keys at my belt, happy and contented, while I spun and embroidered among my handmaidens. A few centuries of time, and much lack of money, prevented me from enjoying that delightful lot."

Another time she wrote: "I am essentially a domestic woman, one who loves to keep house, and if I do say it, as I shouldn't, my real talent is not for writing but cooking . . . inventing new dishes. I revel in sauces and gravies. I even enjoy washing dishes." Smilingly, she could quote her brother: "Ed says that in me the world got a bad writer and lost a good cook."

Between Elizabeth and Edward Meriwether, youngest of the three children, the special bond strengthened with the years. She had babied him, and she had looked after his welfare during his first years as a boy at work. In an accident at the family plant, Ed lost an arm—a shattering blow. It was then that Lizzie intervened, quietly, skillfully, to raise his spirits, encouraging him to go out with girls, to resume his old ways. Life had hardly ended for him, she argued; Ed could drive a buggy, earn his living like anyone else.

Her ability to lead others away from their hours of despair revealed itself then as it did again and again in the ensuing years.

There was, it now appears, only one thing that she herself could not bear—the nickname of Lizzie. At Hollins the sadistic city girls snickered at the homely sound of it, and she had writhed. At first, however, she herself had used it proudly; still extant is a small pink calling card of her adolescence, with the words Lizzie Meriwether printed neatly on one side. But she had come to wonder when and how it might be changed.

Home again from Illinois, she found that her father needed a part-time bookkeeper and letter-writer; why couldn't she do the work? She could, and she spent half her days in the dimly lighted Meriwether offices. Elizabeth had always enjoyed writing notes to friends and relatives; as to her general writing interest, she said she might have "acquired some of it through the bloodstream," for she had several "letter-writing grandmothers."

In that earlier South, it seemed that people were forever in correspondence. New Englanders clustered in towns and villages; however, the far-flung Southerners, if they wished to communicate with a neighbor, had to send a letter a long way, "and we made them mighty full of news and feeling," and included everything from a recipe to a pack of spring seeds. In her new job Elizabeth was acquiring skill in business communications and tact in handling customers and petitioners.

"She was always interested in business, in a fashion," the younger Gilmer notes. "She asked about investments and understood a bit more about them than most women." Yet the small details of such subjects as arithmetic fretted her, and she did not enjoy the handling of cash. Getting change in a store, she would look at it and ask the clerk, "Is this right?" Reassured, she departed.

She had returned to Clarksville to discover her younger sister Mary in the full flush of her soft beauty, with gallants occupying the gallery, yard, and parlor; their numbers embarrassed Mary and perhaps the older girl as well. It was something of a reflection; why couldn't poor Lizzie have her share?

Their brother Ed remembered how he sat in a tree one afternoon and overheard Mary's latest dilemma. The suitor, desperate for her, put his hat aside and took up a gun. If Mary would not marry him, he would blow out his brains, right there on the lawn. As she often did, Mary cried, and the young man did not carry out his threat, presumably to the disappointment of the eavesdropper. If Lizzie laughed at the episode, her amusement might well have been wry.

Then a relative appeared on a visit—George Gilmer. Lizzie's stepmother welcomed her favorite brother, and so did others of the household. Between jobs (his last one had proved too routine), he now considered several possibilities, all highly promising. George went about the town with the dash and charm of the traveling man of the 1880s. He talked more and more about engines and the way they would revolutionize the world; he had a notion for a device or two of his own.

As Lizzie and Mary listened, their stepmother watched, and gradually the rest of the family realized that the second Mrs. Meriwether had hopes in a new direction. Mattie Meriwether felt an ever-growing fondness for Elizabeth, a warm appreciation of her qualities. As for George, whether or not the others understood, he sometimes puzzled and disturbed his older sister. She knew that her bachelor brother couldn't keep a job very long, that he often fought with his employers and left them in anger.

George seemed to enjoy life, but he lacked stability. Why not give him that stability, and make Lizzie happy at the same time? A bargain for both, and one planned in kindness.

Almost certainly Elizabeth did not fall in love with her cousin. Decades later she told women friends: "The marriage was not my idea. I don't suppose I ever felt toward him as they thought I did, or should have felt. . . . Still, it was the way my stepmother wanted it." Another member of the family has suggested that, close to twenty-one, Lizzie had begun to worry, as did many an unmarried girl of that age. "You might have called it a slight touch of panic."

Finally, friends spoke of George's interest in another girl. Some thought him all but engaged. This was, perhaps, the last straw, and when George asked the question, Lizzie promptly answered yes. George went to work in the Meriwether plant, and in 1882 he and Elizabeth were married.

In the scant mention which she herself made of the event, she said: "Having finished school, I tucked up my hair and got married, as was the tribal custom among my people." She added that she was "expected to settle down on Main Street and spend my life as a Main Streeter; but fate had other plans."

Within a few weeks she realized that she faced a lifetime of problems. George's sister had not sensed all the reasons for his fits of irritation and his difficulty in remaining in one place. The young wife knew suddenly that she had married a man of emotional unbalance. The world was against him, he murmured, people schemed to hurt him. Soon he was suspecting Elizabeth, his sister, everybody around him. He fell into moods of grim silence and disappeared for an afternoon or a day.

Then George's behavior began to improve. He regained a measure of composure, his scowls disappeared, and he stayed quietly at work. Whether Elizabeth comprehended at once the extent of his emotional uncertainties, we cannot be sure; but before long she understood that she would have a hard time in this marriage.

For a while George continued in the family plant at Clarksville, and then there were further signs of restlessness. The position offered no future, and George wanted something better. Elizabeth had hoped to stay near home, with some assurance of security and comfort. Yet her place must be with her husband.

Unhappily she accompanied him to one Tennessee town, then another, then to Birmingham. George took a position, liked it at first, then decided he hated it and stormed off. He had connections with hardware companies, chemical firms, and, for a longer time than in most cases, the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company. Elizabeth was traveling, as she had hoped once to do, yet not in the way she had planned. Her nerves taut, she saw almost nothing of the woods through which the trains rocked, or the distant mountains.

In the ugly rooms in which they boarded—a long procession of them—she missed the settled atmosphere that she had known. Relatives remember her references to her need for "home," her hints of a longing to return. Now and then she did visit Clarksville, when the requirements of George's work separated them. In a new position with the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, George worked as one of the operators of a wood distillation plant in the remote mountains. The plant, in continuous operation, required his presence, month in, month out. While it was not an ideal post, George took it because they needed the money, and badly. Later he told her of the harassing sameness of the work, relieved only by poker games that went on for three and four months, the men keeping careful score and settling at the end.

Another half year, another job. Sometimes the young Gilmers returned together to the Meriwether house; yet exactly how things stood between them the family did not know, and they hesitated to ask. Even so, the stepmother understood that she had been wrong, that she had fostered a mistake; but Elizabeth was holding to her marriage contract.

Her experiences of this period intensified her respect for money and its value. Often a few more dollars might have meant a great difference for both of them. In retrospect she managed to joke about the matter: "To show you how much I gave up, I went without a new hat for several years. Only a woman will appreciate what that meant."

She knew by then that she would not have a family. There would be no children for this woman who had always loved them and yearned for her own. Often, later, she said she had wished to have seven sons, and at times people saw her eyes fill when she held a baby's hand—as someone said, the only one she could have clasped that would have been smaller than her own. No woman was really poor, Elizabeth Gilmer commented, with "baby arms around her neck . . . more priceless than all the expensive gems encircling the throat of money-rich but childless women."

That touch of sharp wit, noticeable at times since her Academy days, now flashed on occasion, though she usually apologized for it. For the most part, however, she had lost her old interest in writing, but she still read anything and everything—books, magazines, newspapers. As for her own writing, "for a time my fondness for it slept."

Later she observed: "There is no doubt that we all depend for happiness, in the last analysis, upon one thing—the people we love. When something goes wrong with our intimate relations, when we are worried about our husbands, daughters, wives, the whole fabric of our lives is twisted." The fabric of her own life was thoroughly altered in those tense years.

A few details of her troubles came out later. To women friends she confessed that for a time she suffered not only the harshness of despair but also hunger. She once found herself down to a few dollars, and then a few nickels. For days she bought chocolate éclairs for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, "because they were the cheapest and biggest things I could get, and the most filling."

Slowly, in part out of necessity, her interest in writing reasserted itself. On bleak afternoons she took up a pen; this might take her mind off her worries, and also help earn a little money. As she was to tell a cousin, Walter Meriwether: "Things go on happening, and we can't even take 'em or leave 'em. They are just there, and to stay." In writing she could find a kind of retreat, a temporary escape.

In 1886, at the age of twenty-five, she was sending off one story, then another, to papers in Nashville, Atlanta, New Orleans. The first ones came back, usually with regrets. Then the Nashville American, the New Orleans Picayune, and other papers began to accept her offerings. Though the pay was only a few dollars, the stories were printed with only slight changes, and she began to see her name in print: Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer, or E. M. Gilmer in cases when it seemed wise not to indicate that she was a woman. Her contact with all of the newspapers had to be by mail, of course; no lady could be expected to visit the offices.

She wrote often on subjects she knew about—race horses, Negroes, rural topics. Her best stories dealt with Woodstock, the stables, the silver prize cups on the mantel, and the races themselves. She told of trapping rabbits in the woods, of training colts, of old-time ceremonial tournaments with men bearing the ladies' colors. At other times she recalled the death of her uncle in the early days of the war, during the cavalry charge at Shiloh. These stories were most effective when she set down scenes she herself had witnessed, less impressive in the imaginative passages, where

she made up heroes and heroines who were more noble than human.

The farther she moved from her basic background, the more lush became her plots and style. Such a tale was "Petit Mamzelle," an overripe composition filled with French planters, strains of Negro blood, revelations on the eve of marriage, and a heroine who went to a nunnery. These yarns followed, for the most part, well-cut patterns. Thus far she had written little that might distinguish her from the usual "gifted" woman of her day who painted china and did embroidery.

The Christmas seasons stirred her to greater efforts. Newspapers in that period tried to attract readers with holiday stories, and every fall for a number of years she had one ready to meet the demand. If the sentiment was thickly applied, it appeared to be precisely what the audience, or at least the editor, called for.

At twenty-eight she gained greater reputation in Tennessee and also a badly needed hundred dollars, when, out of 177 contest entries, the Nashville American awarded her the prize. The newspaper showed no amazement that her story, "How Dan Won the Christmas Stakes," took the honors. "We are not familiar with the name of Gilmer, but years ago Miss Lizzie Meriwether was a bright, witty, vivacious little woman, full of fun and frolic. Even then she had won local fame as a writer, and, as she was one who looked on the bright side of life and gathered up the better things that fell in her path, she grew as the years passed by. . . . We hope to, and doubtless will, hear from her again."

The Clarksville Chronicle considered that the story carried "a thrilling pathos that awakens the tenderest emotions of the heart. No one can help regretting that poor little Dan was killed in his first race, just after the noble mare, Hilda, responded so faithfully to the affectionate coaxing, as if fired by inspiration to win the boy's Christmas present; but then, it will be conceded that it was just the right time to kill him. . . . Whatever other distinction may be accorded the writer, Mrs. Gilmer has established her fame for knowing just when and how to kill a boy."

The hundred dollars that the boy-killing brought her was soon spent.

When Elizabeth was thirty-two, a real crisis occurred. She returned to the family, haggard and trembling, maintaining self-control with an effort. Before an hour passed, the Meriwethers realized she was quite sick.

Elizabeth had lost weight until her arms looked like "matches with skin on them." She lay in bed with her black eyes searching the ceiling, her lips moving in silence. She would not talk of her trouble, but she could not deny that it was the worst she had ever known. George appeared, and they learned that he had lost his most recent job. He also was disturbed, almost distraught.

Unfortunately, the Meriwethers themselves had suffered a bad turn of fortune. Elizabeth's father went abruptly from one of those "up" periods to another very far down, and Elizabeth's emotional tension was increased. Her brother Ed had a job in Nashville, at five dollars a week, which did not help a great deal.

She began to cough, and this alarmed the family. They insisted on fetching a doctor, who examined her with concern. Her irregular life had weakened her constitution, and the doctor feared—to use the term of the day—consumption. Also, he detected signs of a profound nervous disturbance. In later years it would have been described as a breakdown.

Some of this Elizabeth had guessed, and for a time she did not seem to care, or to heed the doctor's words about the need for a different attitude, "a reasoning with yourself," and for a complete change of atmosphere in some healthful place with nothing to remind her of the past few years. A healthful place—in such times, how could they manage even a trip to the next town?

Yet somehow the family did manage. Will Meriwether conferred with his anxious wife. In spite of their financial situation, they arranged to take Lizzie to a region just being talked about as a resort spot. It would not be an expensive place like Saratoga or the fashionable Virginia springs. The doctor approved the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and gloomily Elizabeth said good-by to George and started out with her parents.

The soft, windy beaches of Mississippi became the scene of her struggle for health and equilibrium. She must sleep regularly, and exercise. Above all, she must turn her mind from the worries that pressed upon it. Years later she often remarked on the despair of this hour.

As she paced the sands or sat beneath the oaks whose gray moss pendants rose and fell with the breeze, Elizabeth Gilmer paid no heed to the people around her. They noticed her, of course, perceiving something of the struggle within her. The few who approached found no encouragement in her listless words.

During these days of her suffering her father, with his usual buoyancy, made a particular effort to improve her mood, and the two grew closer than ever. Will Douglas Meriwether had always looked after his tiny first-born with affection and admiration; he preserved copies of her school essays and every notice written about her school career, and showed them to others. Now he watched her with brooding love and concern.

To divert her, Will Douglas insisted firmly that Elizabeth play cards with him. He enjoyed card games; in fact, the family said that anyone who found himself with Will Douglas for more than ten minutes would be drawn into one. From her early years, however, Elizabeth had disliked cards. "I don't disapprove," she said, "it's just that I can think of almost anything that's more interesting." For a long time, she claimed, she considered the red or black colors had no significance. "I thought you just took the shade you liked." Though she wanted to do nothing of the sort, she nevertheless agreed to take up this pastime. "I understood that he wanted to help, and I blessed his kindness. And then nobody could really stay droopy for long when he was around; he did more for me than I realized."

It happened that the past two seasons had been disappointing at Bay St. Louis, the Gulf settlement chosen by the family. The expected throng had not arrived, and the Meriwethers had been able to take a cottage more ample than they might otherwise have afforded. It also happened that the place next door was occupied by a remarkable woman from New Orleans—the forty-four-year-old "Pearl Rivers," Mrs. Eliza Jane Poitevent Nicholson—the poet who owned and edited the Picayune.

Nearly twenty years earlier this frail lady, upon the death of her

first husband, had walked into the paper's office to announce that she was taking over in his place. The journal faced a risky future, with a threatened receivership, surly creditors, and a serious libel suit for \$200,000. Eliza Poitevent had been the first woman in the city to enter newspaper work, which had been peculiar enough; then she had become a female publisher!

She had effected a quiet revolution in the New Orleans newspaper field, revamping the paper, making it more than a going concern. She had seen the possibilities of attracting women readers, whom few journals of the eighties even considered.

Shocking traditionalists, she had begun a society column, and she continued to hunt out material for women readers, though in other respects her *Picayune* stayed safe and conservative, pre-eminently a family newspaper. Neither she nor anybody else at the establishment minded when the paper was called "the old lady of Camp Street." She married George Nicholson of the *Picayune's* business office, and now—from her uptown New Orleans home or her Gulf Coast retreat—Mrs. Nicholson kept a firm hand on their enterprise.

None of this Elizabeth Gilmer knew. She said later, however, that "destiny—and I believe in Kismet as implicitly as any Mohammedan—put me into the house next door to Mrs. Nicholson." They met through the Nicholson boys—Leonard and Yorke. The sick young woman was stopped by the children on one of her innumerable walks. Her love of young people cut through her inner disturbances, and soon they talked about shore birds that swept over the sands, and then horses she had ridden in Tennessee. When their mother approached, Elizabeth Gilmer spoke a few minutes with her, then disappeared.

In that short encounter Eliza Nicholson guessed a great deal about the odd newcomer. "I often thought," Elizabeth said afterward, "that she was like little Billee in Du Maurier's story, who knew things by the grace of God, without being told." Before long, in conversations with Elizabeth's stepmother and father, Mrs. Nicholson found out much more about her, and then invited her over for tea and after-dinner talks.

Elizabeth did not reveal many of her real problems, but Eliza

Nicholson, who had had a good share of her own, sensed more and more of the reasons for the pain in the dark eyes, the occasional harsh look in the nervous face. And as they talked, Elizabeth understood more about her new friend. She and young Mrs. Gilmer had several parallels in their lives. Each had had a mother who was ill and had been unable to give her full attention. Each faced the need to support herself; and each was small, and often ill. Of Mrs. Nicholson, an observer noted that she was "both enterprising and economical," a phrase that might well have been applied to Elizabeth Gilmer.

The Nicholson boys, who liked Miss Lizzie a great deal, saw her begin to smile, and heard her voice quicken as she spoke of things that amused her. Before this meeting Elizabeth had made an effort to write again, and now she applied herself, steadily, determinedly. Eventually she could advise a nephew: "The only panacea for grief is to keep so busy that you have no time to think of your sorrow, and to work so hard you sleep at night through sheer exhaustion. I know, for I traveled the dark road for thirty-five years, and I should have gone crazy if I'd had time enough to do it."

Her father saw the changes with delight; he continued to draw Elizabeth "out of herself and into the world," as he said, and she continued the card games with him. She no longer thought them so annoying; "for his sake I could even remember what a spade looked like," she said. And in time, happily, Will Douglas Meriwether and his wife could leave her and go back to Tennessee. The father's ebullient spirits were brighter than ever, and he went off with a sweeping wave of the hand. He'd be back to see her, he promised, and indeed he did return many times through the years.

With reviving spirit, the young Mrs. Gilmer thought over what she had learned about Mrs. Nicholson and the paper. Years earlier the *Picayune* had run some of her occasional pieces, but she doubted that she could hope for a regular position. Still, she had to make some kind of living, didn't she?

One evening, when sitting by the Nicholson fire, she glanced about the room, caught the reflections on the silver, and thought of Dick—the "Mr. Dicks" of her childhood—and the way he had preserved the family service during the war. She told the story and

Mrs. Nicholson, intrigued, asked several questions. Elizabeth said: "Do you think I could write it for the paper?"

Although the Picayune had many such requests, from fluffy-brained matrons to gawky graduates of seminaries, Mrs. Nicholson nodded. She would be happy to see the story. The next morning Elizabeth labored over the phraseology, rewriting several times. Using literary license, she fictionized slightly, substituting a woman for Mr. Dicks, and finally put the manuscript into Mrs. Nicholson's hand.

The newspaperwoman read slowly, without glancing up. Then she exclaimed: "Why, child, you can write!" Then from her desk she drew out three dollars; the article was sold. "Three whole, round silver dollars. . . . They looked like cartwheels to me. I still believe it is the largest sum ever paid for a piece of fiction."

Mrs. Nicholson immediately showed her how the piece must be edited, "performing a major operation on my adjectives and vocabulary, which were grand and flowery in those days." Elizabeth Gilmer was puzzled but pleased.

She was even more pleased when she read her article in print, headlined in the *Picayune* as "A STORY OF WAR TIMES. How Chloe Saved the Silver." In a brief introduction Mrs. Nicholson explained how her "bright little next-door neighbor," who "promised to be a source of great pleasure and profit to me," had first told the incident, which brought tears to her eyes.

The "bright little neighbor" became steadily brighter. Encouraged, she tried another story, pruned the excess verbiage, or some of it, and saw it printed. Others appeared, and each meant more dollars and a happier look in Elizabeth Gilmer's face. A year passed, and Mrs. Nicholson found many ways to help Elizabeth and improve her finances. Staying on at the Gulf Coast, Elizabeth "came to love Mrs. Nicholson as a sister." Her depressions were vanishing. A doctor pronounced her physical condition improved, and though the emotional hurts remained, they lessened.

Elizabeth went to New Orleans, to visit the Nicholson home on Jackson Avenue and Carondelet Street. She gasped at the brilliance of Canal Street, stared at the French theaters in the old Creole section, and rode along the broad thoroughfares in the newer American districts. She had never seen so big a city, and she took in the wonders of the levees, the recently installed electric lights, the river town's many-hued population, its polyglot accents, the casual sophistication of the New World's Paris. "When the first person took me for a Creole," she joked, "I almost didn't say I wasn't. I felt this was 'my town.'"

If Mrs. Nicholson had done her a service, she could do one for the young Nicholson boys. In that Little Lord Fauntleroy age, their mother dressed them in kilt skirts and blue corduroy blouses with white lace collars, and she kept their hair long—Yorke's flowing below his shoulders, Leonard's, worse, in a tow-colored plait extending to his waist. "I was shunned by the girls and ridiculed by the boys," Leonard recalled. Elizabeth Gilmer went to the children's defense, standing up to her benefactor in a serious argument. Leaving the mother in "great grief and grudging acquiescence," she took Leonard to the barber, then to Godchaux's for his first short pants, making him "happy as Cinderella." Yorke's liberation followed, and the two remained her friends all their lives.

By this time Elizabeth knew she wanted a liberation of her own, a chance to support herself. But fate was already directing things her way. The *Picayune's* star was "Catherine Cole," the chatty Mrs. Field, who ranged the bayou country, Europe, and other places, sending back voluminous articles. Leading writing lady for years, she treasured her position. Of late, however, the paper had taken on Marie Points, a Creole, for secondary features of interest to women.

Catherine Cole resented this, thinking the Frenchwoman was being groomed to take her place. John S. Kendall, for years a Picayune staff member, recalled that Mrs. Cole had no basis for her conclusion; yet there it was. Catherine Cole had red hair; Eliza Nicholson had red hair. Catherine Cole resigned in a fury and joined the staff of the Times-Democrat. As everybody suspected, the void would not be filled by Miss Points. At this propitious moment Elizabeth Gilmer applied for a job. Eliza Nicholson quickly decided that Elizabeth at least should have an opportunity to show what she could do.

One day in 1894, the two women set out together along the cobblestoned streets for the offices of the Picayune. It would be the

first time Elizabeth Gilmer had set foot in a newspaper office; and her qualifications did not seem very impressive. A woman of thirtythree, admittedly not brilliantly educated, with a limited knowledge of city ways, and still bothered by personal troubles . . .

The Picayune's "big, rambling, dingy old building" stood on Camp Street. Narrow steps led up to the editorial-news department. Her alarm increasing, Elizabeth followed Mrs. Nicholson up the stairway, which "looked like the Golden Stairs to me because they led to the land of my heart's desire." They passed down a dark hall into a big room with a desk, at which stood an awesome dignitary known to her only as Major Burbank.

"Major," said Mrs. Nicholson, "I've brought you a girl to help you with your work."

The Major rumbled: "I need a roustabout—not a canary." Then he gave Elizabeth her first assignment, to hunt births and deaths for the vital statistics column, at six dollars a week.

CHAPTER 4

Salad for a Sunday Meal

n a drab room with gravy-brown walls, located on Camp Street in downtown New Orleans, Elizabeth Gilmer sat night after night, reading newspapers or working over scribblings of her own. From one of her portrayals of the mellowed interior of Woodstock she would sometimes glance at the factory-made dresser and chairs of her small chamber. Once, perhaps, the place had been shabbygenteel; now it looked merely shabby. After each pause she returned quickly to her self-assigned chores.

By application, and an almost fanatical zeal, she made up for the knowledge she lacked. Setting out to learn her trade, she "studied the backs off books of synonyms and word-books and dictionaries. I memorized editorials that I liked. I followed big stories in every part of the country to see which papers played them up best. I dissected the work of the leading paragraphists. . . ."

A contemporary pictured Elizabeth Gilmer: "On an afternoon when even the tar on the streets melted, she huddled over the newspaper sheets, running her pencil up and down while her sleeves wet the page. The heat could breathe down over our ware-

house of a building like the devil panting after a sinner and still she stayed there, using a typewriter with two fingers that looked too small for the purpose. She learned craftsmanship by main effort; and once that woman learned anything, she never forgot it."

Meanwhile, however, there were prosaic beginner's chores. If a rival collected more births than she did, Elizabeth cried. At funerals she also wept; absorbed in her assignments, she became "so dissolved in tears, I was thought to be a member of the family and placed at the head of the coffin." When covering the mortuary beat, she once came in panting over a death that nobody had heard about—a poor carpenter, just fallen from a roof. The staff accused her of pushing him off.

Whether she pushed or not, she did so well in mortuary that she won a promotion—to recipes. There she clipped "favorite receipts" and concocted a few of her own, indulging her enthusiasm for cookery by using the single gas burner in her quarters. Meanwhile she wrote home regularly, to her ailing husband and her family. Her father and mother, back in Tennessee, were far from pleased about her job. Why couldn't Lizzie have tried something more ladylike?

The newspaper on which she had started launched or helped launch the careers of some important American writers. George Washington Cable, then near the height of his fame as an interpreter of the South, had begun his work within those walls. Lafcadio Hearn, the myopic Greek-Irish genius, had been a Picayune man in the days when he prowled the crumbling edges of the French section, talking to sullen grigri artists, or collecting notes on excitable human curiosities and revolutionary exiles. And there were others: Stephen Crane and Walt Whitman, Brander Matthews and Irwin Russell . . . History lay thick around her, and she absorbed it with delight.

Sometimes she saw history in the making, as in the case of a pistol duel between two public figures. From her desk at the window she looked out to catch it all. C. Harrison Parker, former Picayune editor, had fumed over a cartoon in the Item ("our loathed and esteemed contemporary," Elizabeth called it), showing him as a dog on the governor's chain. Parker determined to pay

back Dominick O'Malley, the flamboyant Item editor, and one day he waited with a friend until O'Malley strolled along.

There came the sound of a pistol shot in Camp Street, and someone cried out: "Parker's plugging O'Malley!" Elizabeth rushed to the window and the rest of the staff peered over her shoulder. Parker missed, and O'Malley pulled out his own weapon. Parker shuddered, shot through the right shoulder. The dog-chain cartoon still rankled, however, and he shifted his gun to the left hand and staggered across the street.

At this point O'Malley found himself without bullets, and tried to conceal his portly bulk behind a telephone pole. Apparently he forgot that he had a stomach, and a large one; his opponent now sent a bullet into this easy target. Each side had scored, and after friends helped the stricken warriors into carriages, Elizabeth and her fellow workers resumed their daily grind.

Elizabeth labored under the eye of Major Nathaniel Burbank, the man who thought her a "canary." She took him up on the remark, observing that he had "consented to let me roost at a little desk on the other side of the room." She promptly learned that the big Pooh-Bah, with his frock coat, thick watch chain, curled mustaches, and booming voice, had a kindly interest in her welfare, which quickly changed to silent admiration. He became the first of several older men who sensed in Elizabeth Gilmer the makings of something far greater than the "lady reporters" of the period.

The Major also realized that this canary needed real training. He gave her steady duties and varied ones; he advised her, questioned her, passed on suggestions. To him she was to pay an ultimate compliment: "He was a newspaper man with a keen insight, a way of seeing the true inwardness of everything. A shrewd judge of human nature, he was quick to grasp a situation." Again she said: "He brought me up by hand."

Some Orleanians sniffed at the Major, and at Major Henry Robinson, his *Picayune* editorial associate. They had been Northern officers during the late bitterness, and unreconstructed Confederates furned when Mrs. Nicholson hired them. Eliza Nicholson, who did not let floods, yellow fever, or other threats bother her, let such

critics fume. As Elizabeth Gilmer said, that act "took courage and background, and they repaid her by serving as gallantly as any knights did their ladies."

From Major Burbank, Elizabeth acquired tolerance, a wider understanding and, not least, an admiration for Abraham Lincoln. At intervals throughout her life she was to praise the great president; when she first did so, many a Southerner writhed. Meanwhile she served with the Major on the Sunday "literary section," which included drama reviews, society notes, and other features. One hour she would be scanning notes for the humorous column, "Picayunes"; the next, she gathered galley sheets for the book reviews, or checked a point with the society editor, Amelia Pasteur. (Miss Pasteur's sister, Eve, served as society editor for the opposition Item, and the ladies exchanged notes, in a highly unusual arrangement.)

At the same time Elizabeth Gilmer hunted exchange paragraphs and other filler and used her spare time on Sunday to write short stories and poems of her own. She bustled around the office, generally in a light muslin shirtwaist and dark skirt, her arms protected against the dust by closefitting "extra sleeves." As Mr. Kendall remembers: "Everybody knew her as a serious worker, yet not somber. Whatever personal sorrows she had, she left them behind when she started for the office."

She had conquered her earlier diffidence and had subdued any impulse to turn from a hostile world. Associates noticed that she had "a way," a smiling manner, a wish and a will to get along with others. There was nothing Machiavellian, nothing calculated, said Billy Steele, another *Picayune* old-timer. "She was interested in people, almost anyone, and she liked people, again almost anyone. I've never known man or woman that she couldn't get along with. It was something inside her."

Around her were men, who, though she was hardly a beauty, might have found her a good companion; yet anyone who made hints in that direction was quickly discouraged. "She could joke and she sat around with us," a staff member says, "but only as one of the force—no frilly graces, no coy looks." The whisper went about that there was a Mr. Gilmer somewhere.

"I remember her from the first," adds Mr. Kendall, "as buoyant and gallant and, above all, loyal. She had made certain choices and she was sticking to them, no matter what. She didn't want anybody to feel sorry for her. Perhaps she had moments when she felt sorry for herself; if so, none of us knew about them." Years later it was Ernie Pyle who summed her up, after a delightful interview (his account of it overflowed two columns): "She's the kind they speak of around the editorial rooms as 'a damn good newspaperman."

The atmosphere of the Sunday department, which was cheerful and relaxed, centered about Major Burbank. He carried his three hundred pounds lightly and with dignity, and he had a certain easy kindliness. He never lost his temper, but, of course, nobody thought to question his decision; the Major was always right—except, alas, once, when Mrs. Nicholson disagreed with him.

The Major carelessly sent through a questionable piece of fiction in which a mother meeting a youth brought home by her son proceeded to seduce him. Mrs. Nicholson, using one of the first telephones, let the Major know emphatically that in the *Picayune* ladies did not seduce their son's friends. It never happened again; and Elizabeth learned something about the limitations of conservative papers.

By now the Major was helping to develop one of the great interests in her life, an interest in which he himself shared—the theater. Nat Burbank was a student and admirer of the drama; as New Orleans ranked as one of the nation's important theatrical centers, the Major could spread himself on the subject. He had seen the great actors and liked them, and he delighted in saying why. More than that, he had a protective affection for almost anything behind footlights; Mr. Kendall thought it an "astonishing amiability."

Elizabeth covered Shakespeare, musical plays, revues, anything that came along. Nat Burbank helped nurse her spark of curiosity about the theater into a steady flame. When a Connecticut correspondent later wrote her that he wept at a sad play, he asked if she considered this a weakness of character. No, she answered, it revealed a depth of feeling. She was awfully fond of "a good two-

handkerchief play" herself, and when she saw Maude Adams act she commented, "they had to remove me from the theater with a mop."

Almost daily she accumulated more theater lore. Into the Picayune came a whole procession of artists, gay, grotesque, and pathetic, to have a "mere word" with the Major. A tragedian would announce: "You know, I'm trying Richard next year. What do you think of this?"

Then, while the Picayune Sunday department stood still and watched, the actor would stride back and forth, drag a twisted foot past Elizabeth Gilmer's desk, fix her with a twitching eye, and declaim to her. Slightly aging Juliets would use the same desk for a bier, and play out the final scene with a non-existent Romeo for the Major's approval. "I didn't even have to go to the theater," Lizzie recalled. "The best walked in and sat in our laps."

On a Saturday afternoon the Sunday department witnessed other scenes as informal as they were creative. While Major Burbank presided at a green-covered table, A. B. Dinwiddie, later to be the president of Tulane University, would be writing book reviews. (According to Mr. Kendall, Mr. Dinwiddie read books and did reviews at the same time. How would he know where to look in the book? "Something always tells me the page, and there it is.") Elizabeth Gilmer would be frowning over a stage review, while Miss Pasteur indulged in a remarkable obbligato method of beating out social notes:

"Mr. Jennings—a cockeyed old buzzard—announces the engagement of his daughter—this must have taken doing—... charming in pink—nobody'll make me believe that—...

"Madame la Lique . . . a biddy if ever there was one . . ."

Everybody talked out loud; everybody worked in his own way, and somehow the assignments got done. For Elizabeth Gilmer these were, in the main, days of excitement and, if not of happiness, at least of satisfaction. Then, a year or so later, the Major called on Mrs. Nicholson and brought back the news: Elizabeth must start to think about a Sunday column, her own.

"I should have been overwhelmed with honor," Elizabeth explained. "Instead I felt scared. I had no idea what they wanted,

nor did they." Mrs. Nicholson wondered if Elizabeth might be guided by the kind of things Fanny Fearn had once done. At the library Elizabeth found one of Fanny's syrupy books; sitting beside Mrs. Nicholson, she picked out a few pages, urging women to Suffer and Be Strong, to hold fast to the male oak which would support the vine. Elizabeth recalled, "I hadn't gone far before Mrs. Nicholson fairly shrieked: 'Stop it!' We saw that the ideas of women were far, far away from what they were then."

Elizabeth thought about the problem when she got back to her rooming house. "It came to me that everything in the world had been written about women and for women, except the truth. They had been celebrated as angels. They had been pitied as martyrs. They had been advised to be human doormats. It was time for them to shake themselves up, and get busy at being practical—to come down to hardpan and be sensible, useful people." Also, Elizabeth noted, women were, if they would only admit it, tired of being flattered or cajoled or lied to. She was ready to try a new approach.

Meanwhile the column had to be dressed up, said the Major; it would be called, of all things, "Sunday Salad." Nat Burbank had a recipe: "A base of crisp, fresh ideas. Over them, a dressing mixed of oil of kindness, vinegar of satire, salt of wit; at the end, a dash of the paprika of doing things." The Major had it settled.

She gulped: "Yes, sir."

"What name will you want?"

It was a natural question. For such a purpose, she was hardly expected to use her own name. Look at Fanny Fearn, Jenny June, Catherine Cole . . . By some peculiar, immutable law, the first and last names had to begin with the same letter. As she stood there, a happy realization came over her; this was her chance to get rid of the hated "Lizzie"!

She had always admired the dignity of names like Dorothy, which "was euphonious without being silly." What last name began with d? She remembered "Mr. Dicks," their Negro helper who had figured in the silver-saving incident.

Dorothy Dix . . . she liked the sound of the words, and so did the Major, and that was it. Not until years passed did she hear about Dorothea Dix, the New Englander who worked so devotedly to obtain fairer treatment for the mentally ill. The newspaperwoman's adoption of a similar name was no sly allusion, as some thought, to the illness of her husband.

From then on she was Dorothy Dix to readers and to her friends. Eventually she referred to herself in that way, signing letters "Dorothy" or "Dolly." Her first columns had a tentative note, as she tested the new medium. They were long—far longer than they would be when she mastered the technique; they seemed conglomerate, with an occasional poem, an anecdote, and notes on what she had just read. But they had the flavor of her personality and a sparkle.

In her column she told of the silly female who assured her that *Trilby* was immoral. When Dorothy protested, the woman replied: "It was written in French." Dorothy argued that this proved nothing, and received a further explanation: parts of it had been so bad, they could not be translated—look at all the French words!

Dorothy joked about the current dress fad, which led women to wear garments previously reserved for males:

Alas, alack, the summer girl cries, No joy, but sorrow surely follows; We've got our brothers' shirts and ties, But we can't see over the collars!

The Major continued to stress the salad motif, using under the standing head a variety of subtitles: "Mixed for a Sunday Dinner Relish"—"Made and Seasoned by Dorothy Dix"—"Dished up by Dorothy Dix as a Relish for the Feast." The Major also encouraged her to work toward a simpler style. "I wrote and rewrote, put it down, came back and rewrote again. Once I did a thing over fifty times. Toward the end it suffered, but not until the forty-first or forty-second time." To this comment she added something that she would repeat many another time: "Hard writing makes easy writing." As she kept on, the Major was pleased with everything except her spelling. Even a Burbank could not eliminate her original touches in that respect.

What she had to say was like nothing else in the paper. She wanted women to vote, to exercise full citizenship rights; she shook

her head at ladies who whined, the pathetically helpless ones. On the other hand, she had no affection for the professional "new woman," who called for war on men. While unlucky women who had to make their own way needed encouragement, she added, they should not fool themselves into thinking it was an ideal life. A husband—she generally noted—was a good thing to have around the house.

In a typical column one can see how the author wrote from her own experience:

The other Sunday I went to church and the preacher took the woman question for his text. He went over the old ground and told how woman ought never to leave the sacred precincts of home and how when she went out into the world to battle with men for money, she unsexed herself and killed the chivalry every man cherished for his ideal of womanhood. Do you know what I wanted to do? I wanted to stand right up there and talk out in meeting. . . . I wanted to say: There are many thousands more women than men in the country. Are the superfluous multitudes of us to sit on the curbstones and suck our thumbs until some man comes along?

I wanted to ask him if it was nobler to stay in the sacred precincts of home and starve, or be the object of grudging charity, than it was to earn an honest, independent living. Finally, I wanted to tell him that chivalry isn't dead, and that no one sees more of it than the working woman. The chivalry that prompts a man to give his women employees reasonable hours and fair wages, and that shows them invariable courtesy, may not be as romantic and picturesque as that which sent a knight into the list with his lady's glove on his helmet, but it's a good deal more to the point, nowadays.

In another column she wrote about a young wife who came to her weeping; the bridegroom had complained bitterly of her cooking. What did it mean, the wife cried, and Dorothy answered:

It means you have married a man instead of an archangel. You needn't cry; you probably wouldn't have found an angel very congenial. But you have got to come to a realization that the man who told you he would make your life a dream of bliss, filled with light

and perfume, has forgotten he ever said it, and expects you to, too . . . He wants his dinner on time, and his house as economically managed as if he had married any of the domestic and homely girls he ever looked at.

"Doesn't he love me still?"

"Surely. Nevertheless I advise you to read the papers and buy a good cookbook."

She sometimes commented on fashions:

Of course I do not wish to discourage the advertisers in the Sunday paper. Speaking from a purely professional point of view, I regard a two-column ad as a literary gem that is calculated to adorn any newspaper. Nevertheless there are times when, in common with every woman who lives in a city and is blessed with country cousins, these enticing accounts of bargains make me wish I was dead and safely through with the judgment. . . . There is something unnatural in the woman who can read without emotion that "oriental challies have been put down to 5c a yard and will be offered on our bargain counter from 9 to 10 A.M.," and when you see that silk waists in fast colors will be reduced from \$2 to \$1.97, whether we want one or not we rise to the bait as a trout does to a fly . . .

For a time she did not give direct advice to readers. The yellowed files contain a forgotten column in which this woman, later to be the greatest of American counselors, lifted an eyebrow at earlier practitioners! Appraising them, she thought their columns "literary freaks, that would be vastly humorous if they were not also pathetic. . . . The questions addressed to the 'Aunt Margarets' or 'Sister Marys' are asked in all good faith and sincerity, and on the answers often depends the welfare of many a simple soul."

This early Dorothy Dix was thunderstruck by the courage needed to answer such pleas for advice. "But they do not faze 'Aunt Margaret.' She settles domestic infelicity in two lines, gives an unfailing recipe for bringing up children in another, then waits for a real good conundrum to be propounded." Fortunately the answers remained conservative, Aunt Margaret being long on patience, strong on virtue; and nobody suffered much. Dorothy Dix went on:

"Somehow, though, one wonders if the advice doesn't seem a little insufficient and unsatisfactory to the women who ask the questions." It might be aggravating to receive always the counsel to endure evils. "Sometimes one wants strong meat and not omelette souffiée."

"Smile on, smile on . . ." Dorothy quoted Aunt Margaret as advising in wife-bullying cases. Dorothy thought, however, that the lady might use some of the man's medicine, giving him an even stronger dose of bullying than his own. Or, with a grudging tightwad, let her try not a smile but a "strike" for better wages. In short, for an unregenerate world Margaret's example lacked backbone. . . . Before long Dorothy would find herself in Margaret's place, and much of the advice she presented would be quite close to the different approach she suggested so ironically in these hypothetical cases.

For the time being she continued to give guidance only in the discussions in her column. She still considered herself a novice in many matters. A fellow employee remembered: "In most cases she held her own; she had learned, and understood, far more than most women. Yet there were wide gaps. Whole periods of history were blank; economics left her puzzled. To her credit, though, she never tried to let on that she knew a thing she didn't.

"She would give me a look: 'I never heard of it. Tell me about it.' That honest, disarming stare did the trick; I'd talk for an hour. I couldn't have said no had I wanted. As I spoke, I realized she was soaking things up and that sometime in the future, somewhere, she'd pull it out of her mind." He paused: "All except things like physics and chemistry. Then she listened, only to give up. 'It's beyond my foggy mind.' Her mind was not foggy, but she understood her limitations."

A few survive who can tell how she walked back and forth from the *Picayune* to the rooming house a few blocks away, day after day, through sun or storm. She bought food at the nearest market, economically, carefully, and cooked it in her room. She had few new clothes, and she did most of her own laundry. She was sending money home to the family, and to George.

Her husband remained ill, physically tired and emotionally upset.

Friends or relatives helped look after him, and sent her reports. What was going to happen to him, and to them? Though she almost never spoke of her husband, he was always in her mind. How to handle the matter, what to say, what to do . . . These questions hung over her as they were to hang over her for most of her life. She could only hope for the best, and push doggedly on in a field which, fortunately for her and for George as well, she liked a great deal.

Always as she went about her assignments she carried a book or a newspaper, something to read, something to study. "For years," one man says, "I never saw her without a paper or a volume of some kind. You could see the ambition, like a thing she carried with her."

Or perhaps there was something else there, her determination to sink herself and her worries in her work; she was following her own prescription of labor as the best agent to drive away fear and uncertainty. . . .

New Orleans provided a visual loveliness that appealed to her taste; there were gardens everywhere, and more trees than most large cities boasted. Often she spoke and wrote of the splash of red crepe myrtle against a courtyard wall, the dramatic blooming of golden roses in October and November.

During this time she was making many women friends, demonstrating her gift for affection and understanding. One of the earliest was Helen Pitkin of the Times-Democrat; she was a few years her junior, a young woman of rare beauty, with auburn hair, a flawless complexion, and a manner that would eventually make her one of the city's great hostesses. When they met, Helen Pitkin and Dorothy Dix were both struggling with heavy office duties. Recognizing a kinship of spirit, they frequently talked over their troubles and occasional rewards.

Her friendship with the lovely Helen showed a facet of Dorothy's interests that would never decline. She admired the handsome, well-groomed man or woman; with no show of malice or jealousy, she would stop to comment: "Isn't that a beautiful girl?" Nevertheless, in her writings she warned both men and women of the way some could trade on appearance, using it as a selfish weapon.

Often she herself was attracted to handsome individuals but, as one friend said, "you could usually be sure that they weren't that kind. She had seen enough of all sorts to know."

In these days when she and Helen had to guard nickels, they often fretted about finances. As they met one evening on the street, Helen Pitkin suggested: "Let's go to Royal Street for an oyster loaf." Here was a monumental achievement of New Orleans cuisines—a large loaf of crisp bread, hollowed out, toasted, buttered, and filled with golden, brown fried oysters, catsup, pickles, olives, and seasonings. All this cost perhaps a quarter and they could share the cost. Years afterward Helen recalled Dorothy's mingled longing for the delectable item, and her answer: "I'm sorry, I just can't afford it."

Already Dorothy had lost two friends. In February of 1896, a few months after her column started, George and Eliza Nicholson died within ten days of each other, of "congestion of the lungs." The shock of her husband's death and her anxiety about her two boys complicated the damage to Mrs. Nicholson's naturally weak constitution. She was conscious until almost the end, and Dorothy spoke of the painful scenes as this woman, who had fought so often for her newspaper and her children, slowly lost the struggle for life.

Dorothy Dix stayed close to the Nicholson boys during these days, trying to comfort them. She had heard her benefactor speak repeatedly about the future of young Leonard and Yorke, and for the rest of her days Dorothy had a particular affection for them and their families. . . . She talked often of the wise and generous woman who had held out a hand to her. "She did more than I have ever done," Dorothy told inquirers about her own career. "Write about her."

As a matter of fact, almost from her start on the Picayune, Dorothy Dix had been largely on her own. Had she failed or produced poor copy or lacked the capacity to carry her own weight, she would not have gone ahead, much less continued on the paper. And already something strange was happening to the Dorothy Dix columns—something which even Eliza Nicholson had not anticipated.

"Dear Miss—or Mrs.—Dix"

eople on Canal Street, down in the French Quarter, and up the green-grown curve of St. Charles, were mentioning a new name to one another. Subscribers told delivery boys what they thought of "this Miss Dix of yours." Lawyers and businessmen stopped officials to ask questions about the provocative writer.

Letters arrived for her—at first one or two, then several more, then small batches of them. The women of New Orleans liked what she wrote and wished her to know it. Dorothy was delighted, and the Major beamed. But all at once came several in another vein, from girls who wrote in tears, and troubled women. The things she said made sense to them; they thought she could understand their difficulties. They felt uncertain, and they wanted her to tell them what to do.

"Dear Miss—or Mrs.—Dix" . . . It had started. For the rest of her life that appellation would be repeated every waking hour. Usually the letter writers wished for a generalized answer in her column. Just say that a friend in sorrow had told her . . . Explain that she had heard of a certain case . . .

These first correspondents wrote in nervously or in fear. Please, under no circumstances, tell the name to anyone . . . Burn up this letter the moment you have read it. . . . Others were more specific. If the writer's identity came out, in any way, she would have to kill herself. She could not stand the humiliation. Nevertheless, the woman—like many others—had taken the chance of appealing to Miss Dix.

A new note appeared in the column. "A woman said to me the other day . . ." "I have been asked . . ." "A letter crossed my desk . . ." The readers grew more and more interested. One of her newspaper associates of that day believes that from the beginning Dorothy Dix knew exactly the right thing to tell her questioners, precisely how to hit the note that would reassure a frightened, middle-aged woman or jolly along an adolescent girl.

Letters piled up in the Picayune mailboxes. Staff members, staring at the flow, laughed and said, "Dorothy, you've got friends!" A few regarded the matter as a joke, a fluke that would soon end. It did not end; the mail came in faster and faster, bringing commendations, amused replies to her quips, and, steadily, those requests for general guidance.

Then, a different kind of letter arrived, calling for a direct, personal reply and usually including stamps. "Please, by no means say anything of this in the paper. Too many people would know right away. Just give me a few words of hope." Or, "All I want is for you to tell me exactly how to act to change my life." The very earnestness of such inquiries frightened Miss Dix.

How would she answer this kind of letter? Dorothy asked the Major, and he hesitated. Before he gave his opinion she had furnished her own reply. Some of the letters were so disturbing that no matter what the Major decided as a policy, she had to answer.

A few dissenting letters reached her desk. How could Miss Dix say what she did? She must not appreciate the true nobility of woman, or—as the correspondent more often put it—womanhood, or even ladyhood. "Have you stopped to think of this view of it, Madame?"

In addition the rumor started that a man was writing the stuff. The paper had an answer. At the top of the column went a line drawing of Dorothy Dix, a somewhat unrealistic picturization of her as a flighty looking young thing in a Gibson Girl shirtwaist with huge puff sleeves and a high-boned collar; and, strangely enough, she was shown peering through a lorgnette. Just why the lorgnette, she herself was uncertain. She never carried one in her life; and what she had to say frequently poked fun at the society type. Perhaps, however, it served to establish her as a "proper" female.

The column's name changed. Her signature had previously appeared at the bottom, yet "Dorothy Dix" now meant something to New Orleans. The "Sunday Salad" went out the window, to be replaced by "Dorothy Dix Talks of Women We Know." That should hold them.

It did for a time. Then a staff member observed that "men are reading it, too!" On the horse-drawn cars they would glance around, turn to her page, fold it so that no one could see, and race through it. In secrecy some man—his name is forever lost—wrote to her, and then others did the same. Not for advice—more time must pass before that happened—but to commend her.

"Keep up the good work." "I quoted what you said to Mamie, and that helped." "Do you know you are writing the first sensible advice . . ." After a time, there came a tentative appeal from a Mr. A. who was having an argument with his wife about a new tablecloth. Mrs. A. had decided on a satin one for guests. Could Miss Dix see her way clear to advising his wife, and other women, in such extravagances? (Mr. A. was just as secretive as the ladies. Please, no names. He would be much embarrassed if his connection came out in any way.)

Miss Dix obliged with a half column. The wife was entirely right. Didn't men realize that tablecloths were investments? True, the lady was indulging in a certain exercise of female vanity, yet she impressed her guests by showing how well her husband was doing, and improved his reputation while being a good hostess!

"I never heard from him again," said Miss Dix. "He probably thought me a traitor."

Soon the paper made another change in the column. The headline was shortened, indicating that the column no longer appealed to women exclusively. It became simply "Dorothy Dix Talks"—the name it would hold for the next half century. She received a raise, then another, then a third one, but her pay remained small. All New Orleans newspaper salaries were low; on the Picayune fifty dollars a week was the top for anyone, and she stayed below that, at thirty to thirty-five.

One explanation was economics; but the staff grumbled that the real reason was a certain Thomas G. Rapier in the business office. For years final authority in all financial matters rested with Mr. Rapier. Whatever his title, he ruled, and after Mrs. Nicholson's death his rule became even firmer. Dorothy Dix admitted later that on one occasion at least she wept over Mr. Rapier's decisions. More philosophically, she described him as "thin, ascetic and half a saint even in this world." Nevertheless his answer to any requests for a raise was almost always "No," with some irrelevant explanation like: "You get as much money as so-and-so, and he has twins."

After a time the paper started a policy of sending its Dorothy Dix to important (and, of course, "proper") women's meetings, not to cover them but to represent the *Picayune*. She might say a few words or she might not; her presence helped to establish her as an actual person and prove that the column was not written by a group of office boys or a cynical male writer.

Speculation increased about Miss Dix. Despite the luster of its hotel and theater life and its upriver reputation for wickedness, New Orleans retained a certain core of social conservatism. Eliza Nicholson had violated several rules when her "Society Bee" flew into the houses of New Orleans to set down what it saw there in that original society column. Breathless matrons had quoted the old southern rule: a lady's name might be listed only three times in a paper, in a notice of her birth, announcement of her marriage, and a report of her death. Eliza had stunned people by filling in the details between these milestones.

Now Miss Dix was going much farther. Mustaches twitched in annoyance; dowagers cleared throats in querulous protest. It was not considered quite nice to read about girls who wondered when a young man would propose, husbands who mistreated wives, or a lady who flew off the handle and screamed at her husband . . . As for Miss Dix's advice, sometimes it had an odd ring. For a wife to

talk back to the head of the household, or to suggest that a mother did not understand everything about her boy . . . !

There were moments of crisis when old-time Orleanians pushed their way into the office "to give the devil" to Miss Dix. Years earlier, on the day Mrs. Nicholson took over the *Picayune*, José Quintero had announced that if anyone disliked a remark printed in the paper's columns, he—a trained duelist—stood ready to take up the matter on the field of honor. His dueling skill had not been required then; and Miss Dix showed that she would not need the help of any latter-day Señors Quintero now.

One morning a purple-faced lawyer walked in and pounded his cane on the floor. Miss Dix's suggestion in yesterday's "Talk" he felt sure had been inspired by his sister-in-law, and now he demanded that such insinuations about his brother be withdrawn. From details printed in the column from a reader's letter, the whole city would know who was meant. . . .

Miss Dix smiled gently. Wouldn't he sit down? "She could make a snake sit down, if she wanted," a witness said. Then, leaning forward almost confidentially, she turned very bland. She could assure the visitor that the letter had arrived from an outlying suburb, and from another woman entirely. She almost purred as she suggested that perhaps the conduct of the man's brother was less well known than he thought! The man and the cane thumped out.

She was also interviewed by more subtle individuals, who came to her desk smiling and said, as in one instance: It would be of great help to a certain person of importance—he could not mention the name—if the authorship of a certain communication could be verified. Miss Dix would realize that it meant a great deal . . .

Politely, Miss Dix interrupted. She was sorry; that note had already been destroyed, and she could not remember even the first letter of the lady's name. In any case—here her look was confiding—would it be good manners to tell what someone said to someone else in a personal letter? Surely her guest would understand. "She made this rascal know just what kind of a rascal he was. And she did it so nicely that he thanked her when he left!"

But not all the personal attention which Dorothy received at

this time was from irate or conniving readers. Her columns inspired dozens of poetic contributions eulogizing Miss Dix, or groaning in good spirits over what she had written. For a time the writing of poems about Miss Dix appeared to be the favorite evening amusement of a third of the subscribers. The paper could run only a few of them. After she had made an amused face in her column over homemade Christmas gifts—a peculiar abomination of the 1890s, when "clever" handicraft assumed the proportions of a menace—a woman wrote:

Oh Dorothy Dix! Dear Dorothy Dix! My plans are all chaos, and I'm in a fix. I came back from church superbly serene; Had made my confession and prayed my soul clean, Had met my "best friend" and gone for a walk; Then came home alone to enjoy your Talk. Oh woman of wit! Oh dealer of woe! Where got you your knowledge of things apropos? That plumb line of yours has gauged me so true, I'm hopelessly, woefully, wretchedly blue. With pleasure and pride into Christmas I pitched— "These are my jewels!" Hand-painted, hand-stitched, Dainty and useless, all dust-catching things-White elephant gifts! (How the memory stings.) Yes, "slipper bags," too. Alas, cruel fate, Many dollars are gone; the Talk came too late. Each one of my friends read Dorothy Dix, And most of them I know are just in my fix, And we'll feel ashamed to send to the other A gift we now know brings nothing but bother. Oh what shall I do? Please come to my aid And darn the great holes that your sharp pen has made In my self-esteem. I'm cross as two sticks, And it's all your own fault, clever Dorothy Dix. Can't write any more; I've just got to cry I love you, I hate you, I wish I could die.

Meanwhile, the family had been writing about George Gilmer, who was showing considerable improvement. He had a new interest, a project about which he talked with zest and enthusiasm.

From his work with the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, George remembered that new processes had been invented for the manufacture of naval stores—turpentine, tar, and the like. He spoke of the way hard wood had been used for the purpose, and wondered: Why not adapt the process to soft woods like pine, with which the lower South is covered? Making small scale-tests of his theory, he had grown steadily more excited about the possibilities. The family wondered if this might be the thing that would bring George back to health.

George wrote his wife to tell her of his hopes. She answered, asking if George would join her in New Orleans. He could carry on his operations there, and she could continue with her job. She was prepared to work still harder to permit him to give all his time to his experiments. He agreed, and soon he was on his way.

Perhaps she asked herself: Is it wise, will it succeed? She knew what some would say. Nevertheless she was ready to try again; it was her job as his wife. And though Mr. Rapier still guarded the Picayune's treasure boxes, she had received another raise. She understood that there would probably be further demands on her salary, and so she and George lived in the same drab room on Camp Street.

No one who remembers her in the late 1890s recalls any indication of increased happiness, or any other change, in her manner. Her associates saw George when occasionally he came for her at the office; a few times, on special days, he waited for her there. "He didn't talk much, though he was polite, almost courtly," one man says. "He asked a few questions, nodded, then sat there. We had the impression that he didn't take this business of a newspaper seriously. He seemed to have no idea what she did there; her column was one of the things his wife did, for which there was no reasonable explanation. Distillation work, which he referred to once or twice, casually—that would be important for the world. And yet, of course, he could be tolerant and reasonable. . . ."

Another Picayune man shared the general impression that Mr. Gilmer had recovered or nearly recovered from a serious illness. He had had bad luck; this time, though, with only a fair turn of fortune, big things lay ahead, and, of course, Mrs. Gilmer would share in them. . . . Meanwhile, George could smile and visit the newspaper and observe its curious ways.

"We whispered together about them," still another staff member says. "When you saw the two of them several times, you inevitably asked how or why they had ever married. I would have said, at least then, that they had very little in common. But there they were."

It may be noted, of course, that in his new role George Gilmer had a problem or two. Entering the newspaper office one night, he and Dorothy were stopped by a young reporter, as brash as he was inexperienced: "How are you, Mrs. Dix? And you, Mr. Dix?" Mr. Gilmer looked away, and his wife made haste to cover the slip.

As they walked together, Dorothy generally moved slightly ahead; her energy and quickness contrasted noticeably with that of the more lethargic George. Those who knew them then caught none of the small signs of happily married couples—exchanges of glances, comments under the breath, shared smiles, deference to each other's opinion. "They seemed to be, well—almost unmarried," said one man.

But also no one ever saw or heard them quarrel. And now Dorothy had set to work to eliminate all sources of friction, all reasons for possible moodiness on George's part. In these days conditions should have been easier for him, after all; at least the economic pressure had been lessened.

John Kendall was one of the few members of the staff who ever went for an evening to their Camp Street room. They had one of the big New Orleans sandwiches, of the kind eventually described as "poor boys"—a monumental French loaf, filled with meats, gravy, tomatoes, and condiments. Mr. Kendall carried up bottles of beer, "and we had a wonderful evening, Dorothy and I chatting away and drinking, and George just drinking. Now and then he made a wry remark, but not often."

Though still a bachelor, Mr. Kendall needed no wife to advise him that Dorothy could hardly be termed a smart dresser. "You had the feeling that what she wore didn't quite go together. Not that it mattered. With so vital and sound a person a thing like clothes wasn't important. Once, though," he chuckled, "she burst forth in a startling red raincoat, and one of the men announced that he was going to call out the fire department!"

After a time George Gilmer was ready to set up an organization for the distillation of turpentine products. He approached several businessmen; his enthusiasm kindled theirs, and they contributed. Dorothy herself added to his capital, and each year she put more money into the enterprise.

"George was really a man of ideas, and not one for details," a relative has noted. "He would throw himself into the planning and launching of a project; the execution he left to others." He put up a small plant at 820 Perdido Street in the industrial section of New Orleans, setting out burners and retorts, collecting helpers, and working seven days a week, at times, to get things into operation.

Today, George Gilmer's name is listed in governmental reports among the pioneers of the industry. Much of what others have accomplished can be traced to his early work. These years provided, in all probability, the happiest phase of his middle life. Success appeared just ahead, and with it the reward for which he had hoped. And for Dorothy Dix the future in New Orleans held greater promise.

CHAPTER 6

The World Took Notice

1898, 1899, 1900, 1901 . . . New Orleans was still Dorothy Dix's universe. She had achieved everything her well-wishers had hoped, had become even more celebrated than Catherine Cole.

But people and places outside New Orleans were noticing her, too. One day, going through the exchange newspapers on Major Burbank's desk, she murmured, "This looks familiar," and passed an article to him. He rubbed his mustaches: "It should. You wrote it five months ago."

That same year she composed a piece—a flowery one—about the demise of summer, telling how the shining young maiden had collapsed suddenly and of the world's mourning for her. For the rest of her life she kept as a memento a scrawled note about that essay from Major Burbank:

Would you know what fame for a newspaper writer is? Here is the pretty little tribute to your dead friend, filched with the scissors of a ruthless child stealer, started on its weary way in the world, without credit and without a known father and mother. Our only satisfaction when a thing is stolen is the thought that it must be good, as thieves usually have good taste.

Yours truly,

A Georgia journal had adopted her "baby" without crediting its authorship. Others would not be so careless. Dorothy was surprised when one southern newspaper, then another, picked up her "Talks." After a while notices appeared indicating that editors were happy to present the work of a new but already popular writer in New Orleans. Sometimes they explained that a certain piece had so pleased them that they wanted to make the author's columns available to their readers.

Dorothy did not go about New Orleans socially a great deal. She had, then and for years to come, an ironic attitude toward organized "society," an impatience with snobbery. Toward those who thought much of formal parties and receptions, teas and their own "standings," she felt a casual amusement, which could be sharply critical on occasion. Nor had she much interest in patriotic or civic groups. Years earlier her aunt, Mrs. Caroline Meriwether Goodlett, had formed the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Dorothy Dix did not join. "I just don't have time for that kind of thing," she explained.

Now, however, at the paper's suggestion she moved in a limited way among the women's clubs of the city. Those who met her liked her at once, responding to the bright-eyed little woman with the soft voice that came from slightly pursed lips. She was ready to work hard for some causes, and she soon received the first rewards of such unselfish efforts.

When Touro Infirmary held a fair, this comparative newcomer was asked to contribute a story to the "chapbook," to appear along with the works of such celebrities as Mrs. Nicholson (Pearl Rivers), the eminent Grace King, remembered for Balcony Stories, the historian Alcée Fortier, the poet Mollie Moore Davis, and others. One or two literary figures tended to look down their noses at this Johnny-come-lately. She did not mind, or, if she did, she managed not to show it.

The year 1897 brought Dorothy a chance to combine two ambitions and also enjoy herself as she had not done in years. She had missed a vacation and needed a rest. It was Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and half the world seemed to be making this an occasion for a European trip. American newspapers, lacking more important news, were sending correspondents, artists, and photographers to provide their readers with hundreds of columns on the Jubilee.

It occurred to the Picayune that Dorothy could take an overseas vacation and work, too—on the side, of course. She was delighted. From her childhood days she had hoped to see Europe. Mr. Rapier, the hawk-eyed master of the treasury, was not quite so pleased, but let himself be talked into it. Whether he realized it or not, the paper had a bargain—a representative who would be conscientious and also frugal. Could a newspaper ask for more?

Yet for Dorothy there arose the problem of George. Would he, or could he, join her? George settled the matter; he preferred to stay and work on his own plans. Still, it might not be advisable for a lady, even one of thirty-six, to cross the ocean alone and then travel in England and on the Continent. A practical solution was devised. Her father, Will Douglas Meriwether, expressed immediate interest. Now in his sixties, he found himself without any job in the offing, and thus he was happy to accompany her.

Her stepmother had died some time before in Tennessee and for a while Will Douglas Meriwether showed his sorrow. But he was a man of irrepressible high spirits and eventually his good cheer came back. Now he began a series of "visits to my children," which continued through the rest of his life. For decades he planned his trips according to the weather—New Orleans in the winter, New York or Chicago in summer, with other jaunts to other relatives, dependent upon the season. And since his relatives covered all of America, Will Douglas covered the country, as a Meriwether ambassador of good will.

The staff bade Dorothy good-by with gifts and good wishes; a few understood how much this trip meant to her. She was gone three months, nearly half the time taken up in getting to and from Europe. Even for her, the amount of copy she sent back was prodigious. The trip widened her scope, developed new interests, and produced reading matter which was witty, observant, and very much her own.

Dorothy gratefully accepted all sorts of travel advice. Some urged "fast ocean greyhounds that throbbed at American society's fever heat," others the cheaper kind of boat, filled with "interesting people," students, actors, German professors, the whole without "society frappé, dressing for dinner and scowling at a neighbor until one ascertains the size of his bank account." She chose a middle course.

They embarked on a beautiful day with a turquoise sky, and a sea like sapphire. A banjoist strummed to a girl; a prince of raconteurs told stories of stage life in Australia. Poor Dorothy was violently seasick, and she did not recover until the ship had almost reached Scotland.

There she considered a day in Glasgow as exhilarating as champagne, the town "an idealized Chicago, if Chicago could grow some hills and get a few centuries of age to tone down her newness."

On a Sunday in June, Dorothy confided her reaction to the Scottish climate, writing that although there was "a current fiction that this is summer," the wind howled around her and blew without mercy on the "red, bare knees" of a Highland regiment. Indoors she recounted her agonies in attempting a fire at a highly polished, much-beknobbed grate, complete with movable back, filigree ornaments, and provisions for "everything except making a fire." After working at it, she found herself in what appeared to be "the dump of a coal mine."

Dorothy's mood brightened as she and her father visited the castle in which Mary of Scotland gave birth to her son. She was touched by pathetic reminders of Mary's good taste; she shuddered at the room in which murderers stabbed Mary's musician Rizzio to death, while the queen begged them to spare him. Dorothy gave the old guide an extra sixpence for pointing out the "blood stains on the floor." He whispered that he did not point them out to everyone, and she informed her readers: "Only the elect, who

can believe anything, are capable of looking at it in the right spirit."

Shortly afterward she described happily how she discovered a statue to Lincoln, "the only one that had a touch of living, human love," with fresh flowers at its base, "tribute of his unforgetting countrymen." On another day she and Pa Meriwether tried to see the ruins of Melrose Abbey at midnight, only to be shut out at eight by an unromantic custodian who hadn't had his tea. She surrendered, as "the dullest woman on earth knows there is nothing to be gained by arguing with a hungry man."

Still, "if one may not have the rose, one takes what is near the rose," and she beheld the melancholy splendors in a purple mist of twilight, with "grass growing in the nave and bats slipping through the cloisters."

Later, she and her father visited Stratford upon Avon, and at the settee where Shakespeare supposedly courted his Anne, Dorothy speculated whether he wooed liked Romeo or Benedict or Orlando, or merely stuttered like a man. . . . Then in Paris she quoted in delight a Frenchman's comment on an English huntsman: "What a heavenly day! Let's go out and kill something!" In the same way, she thought, a woman would say: "Let's go out and buy something."

She stopped at the establishment of Monsieur Worth, and there her reporter's ears picked up lamentations over the way the press destroyed exclusive models of 1897 by picturing them for all the world. Then she recalled, in a swirl of "crushed collars of vivid green chiffon" and "court trains of gold brocade," a trip through this court of high fashion.

For a guide she had a pretty young woman with "that haughty and superior air of being silk-lined throughout, and never wearing anything but real lace, that I had fancied the sole prerogative of the American shop girl." Dorothy considered Worth's establishment the most solemn place she had ever entered. "Everybody spoke in low, suppressed tones, and a dim, religious light pervaded the long halls. Awed and humbled, I followed . . ." Later,

humbled no longer, she concluded with a pert observation on bargains, the great world, and New Orleans' Canal Street:

The bargain counter in London and Paris is just as seductive and just as much a delusion and a snare as at home. Only the "left-overs" anywhere are cheap. A good thing, in good style, is always worth good money. And finally, the woman who takes her purse and wanders up Canal Street need cast no envious eyes across the water. The mountain has come to Mahomet. The merchandise of the world comes to our shops and there is very little, if anything, she cannot buy as good, or as cheaply, at home.

Her buoyant father spied a London shop of "Merryweather," and he had to inquire about a family connection. Heads of the firm, chatting with him, remembered that the name had once been spelled Merriwether and that there had been a Scottish connection. Pa had something to talk about for years.

As for the Jubilee itself, Dorothy did justice to the flamboyance of the occasion. "Long-legged, swarthy horsemen from Canada and the bush of Australia; little, yellow Malayans, dark-skinned Indians in monstrous turbans . . . Negroes from the gold coast of Africa; Chinese sailors in hats that looked like inverted wash basins. And, seeing all this, you had a new idea about that English drum-tap that echoes around the world."

On swept foreign ambassadors and equerries, attachés and thirtynine foreign princes, with their uniforms, masses of gold lace and embroidery, jeweled and glittering orders. There was the special guard of honor, and, at the climax, "walking with stately step, eight beautiful cream-colored Hanoverian horses," which drew the carriage in which sat the Queen, a plain and elderly woman in black, with a white sunshade.

Back at her lodginghouse, after "assisting Queen Victoria to the best of my ability, to celebrate her jubilee," Dorothy spoke as usual to humbler people. A serving girl asked plaintively if Her Majesty wore her crown. "No, she was just a fat old lady in a plain black bonnet." Dorothy reported hearing an American call the crowd disappointing and unenthusiastic: "You ought to hear us yell when our candidate is elected President!"

As for herself, she remembered a kindly Englishman who "took pity on my ignorance and told me (wrong, as I discovered from consulting the official programme) which is which of the royal princesses." He assured her that she would never behold another such spectacle. "'Pouf,' say I, waving the Stars and Stripes, 'just come over to the New Orleans Mardi Gras, and we'll show you a procession sight.'"

Dorothy returned home clear-eyed, with renewed enthusiasm. The trip became a milestone; from it dated a love of foreign travel that some considered a near mania. She had been free of worries, and she had enjoyed herself as never before in her life. Thereafter she told friends that a good long trip was a solution to nearly any problem, if one could afford it. She had made up her mind to try to afford many more of them.

In a flush of appreciation she assured readers that one could go anywhere, look at mountains, kings, volcanoes, see what Dante saw, or Dickens or Robespierre. "Then afterward you'll have it always with you. You've only to close your eyes and you're back at Melrose Abbey or in Scott's halls or Mary Stuart's prayer room." She would add: "Go when you're young, and store it up for the time you have to sit by the fire." Already she was planning her next trip.

She had not said—perhaps she did not admit it to herself—that George's absence might have been a factor in her delight. She now went back to the difficult husband, to find no important change. George continued to work with optimism; though he had problems, he felt sure that things would work out.

Her own success was mounting. She received an unexpected testimonial when a rival newspaper, the Item, acknowledged her standing in the community with an editorial which meant a great deal to her. "Newspapermen are not given to throwing bouquets at one another," she once explained.

Major Burbank and the rest of the staff welcomed her home, and happily she went back to her columns and the letters that had been locked away against her return. Among them she discovered, as she did from time to time, some harshly disapproving notes. For

years she treasured a particular brickbat. Obviously the woman had tried hard to think of the best insult for a person who had no truck with ladylike sensitivity. She wrote: "You're just about as sentimental as a mustard plaster!" Dorothy roared over it; in her words, it was a "bird."

Others, though, could hurt. Of a particularly angry letter, she said: "Here's one that says he's read me for several years, liked everything I wrote, till yesterday. One out of hundreds—not a bad average. Still, it's the only time he bothered to write."

She had determined early not to follow a similar course. When she found something in the paper that appealed to her, she sought out the man to tell him so. For days she might reread a column from Chicago or Baltimore and then write the author, saying how much she had learned from him. "He benefited me," she explained. "He deserves to know."

By 1898 the Picayune editors were only beginning to sense what they had acquired. They sent her on assignments to Louisville, Chicago, and Memphis; her stories led to talk in New Orleans, and other towns as well. When she made such trips, she so impressed fellow reporters that they often did pieces on her and her work. Northern journals wrote down for facts about her, and Major Burbank provided them.

Her spreading fame presented problems. Several small syndicates asked permission to use her stories. After some uncertainty she agreed. They were widely reprinted and the request arrived for more. In New Orleans the opposition *Times-Democrat* subscribed for one series, and the *Picayune's* face reddened when the name of Dorothy Dix was seen helping rival circulation.

"Yet we had no grounds for objection; we had given permission for the syndication," a Picayune executive explained. Furthermore, it would not have been wise to make too great a point of the matter; Dorothy Dix was becoming a valuable property. The management itself received letters: "The first thing I turn to . . ." "I don't know of anything like her."

The New York Star devoted paragraphs to this "southern writer coming well toward the front." After a summary of her career it added: "She is still quite young, only well in her twenties, a black-

eyed, low-voiced and womanly small person, as unlike as possible to the blue-stocking of popular imagination." The account strikes two significant notes. Throughout her life, though she did many things that made conventionalists frown, sitting down with murderesses, riding early airplanes, and so on, she remained a completely feminine, disarming individual.

And at this date she had begun to exercise the womanly prerogative of being discreet about her age. After all, she had started late, and what did it matter if she stayed silent when others said she approached thirty instead of forty? Comparative youth was an asset to which she intended to cling as long as she could. Small women, of course, always looked younger.

Another editor went beyond the others. For a long time, he said, Dorothy Dix had seemed to him "one of the most artistic newspaper writers in the country . . . She has by far the broadest clientele of readers among the writers of the *Picayune* . . . I would not charge the management with knowing it, but the *Picayune* has a great little newspaperwoman in Mrs. Gilmer. The public knows it."

Meanwhile, through 1899 and into 1900, the volume of her writings rolled on: fiction such as "Mara's Story," "Juba and the Ghost," "Her Christmas Gift," "How Sisseretta Found Christmas," "A Modern Miracle," "A Saintly Sinner," "A Ranch Heroine," her weekly "Talks," smaller articles and, at the same time, the letters to individuals that the public never saw. Most of her fiction appeared under the name of Elizabeth M. Gilmer; she tried to keep two literary identities.

That historic date—January 1, 1900—inspired her to give a sage (and, as time proved, valuable) warning to the men of the country. Her column, headed "The Outlook for Bachelors Is Gloomy," said:

The new century opens with a gloomy outlook for bachelors. Their liberty is threatened on every side. It has always taken talent to enable an eligible young man to remain single. In the future nothing short of absolute diplomatic genius will keep his neck out of the matrimonial halter.

More portentous still for the bachelor is the fact that the twentieth-century woman is going to take a hand in the love-making. She is going to be wooer, as well as wooed, and when one reflects on how thorough, and scientific, and determined the modern woman is in everything she undertakes, it is enough to send the cold chills down the backbone of every man who cherishes a preference for personal liberty. . . .

Already a club of twentieth-century young women has been organized at Binghamton, New York, with the avowed purpose of taking the initiative in love-making, and overthrowing the proposing precedents of the past. . . .

It is clearly impossible for any man to remain single much longer. A hundred years from now we may look forward to the Barnum of the future advertising—as one of the attractions of his unparalleled side show—a genuine, bald-headed bachelor.

In June of 1900 Dorothy Dix went to Milwaukee for a woman's federation meeting, and found herself a star. People asked to meet her; at receptions she outdrew older, greater names but managed to do so without offending them—no mean deed. Some who talked with her told of their surprise that so "southern" a person was "also endowed with the pluck and energy which generally characterizes the woman of the North." Invited to talk, she began to realize that she had another gift, which she would eventually develop.

Three months later, back in New Orleans, she had her first full realization of how far she had come. An envelope arrived, marked New York Journal, with a letter signed by an executive of the paper. Rudolph Block had been reading a few of her articles and wished to use some of them on the Journal's editorial pages with her signature.

Dorothy Dix stared. Nobody needed to tell her what such a request implied. The Journal's editorial page offered a circulation greater than that of all the combined publications for which she had yet written. It had national prestige; her writing would appear beside the work of famous authors like Ambrose Bierce, the remarkable Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and others.

Her impulse was to accept at once. Then the men around her saw her hesitate. Was her style too local, too "southern"; suppose people up there laughed in the wrong way, and they dropped her? Also—she hinted this only once or twice—suppose George objected? A colleague said bluntly, "Well, ask him."

She did, and returned with relief in her eyes. George had not objected; he had been unimpressed, as if the New York Journal meant scarcely more than the Green Springs Beacon. Still she wondered, and when she sent off a few tentative pieces, she accompanied them with a half-dozen questions. Was there too much satire for larger audiences; might they think her frivolous? Might it be better if . . . Dorothy received a penciled reply:

Dear Mrs. Gilmer:

The woman's club article is exactly what I want. There's a delicious humor about it that is intensely pleasing. Do, oh! do, let all the humor in your soul flow into whatever you write. It's the greatest field in the literary world, humor is.

Sincerely, RUDOLPH BLOCK

As her fellow workers looked on, she started three or four additional articles. When a specially marked copy of the Journal arrived, the staff crowded around to stare at the familiar by-line in the unfamiliar place. "Oddly," one of the Picayune veterans says, "even now she didn't quite realize what it meant. She kept shrugging—'Well, how do you know they won't throw out the next one?,' or 'Wait till they wake up and find what they're getting.'"

She was working at her regular assignments when, ten days after that last note from Rudolph Block, a telegram dropped on her desk:

MRS. E. M. GILMER (DOROTHY DIX), PICAYUNE, NEW ORLEANS. WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME TO NEW YORK TO WORK ON JOURNAL? IF SO, PLEASE TELEGRAPH ME CONDITIONS, SALARY, ETC., AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

Her friends gathered in council. Leave New Orleans, start out in New York? . . . "For a week we could see her arguing with her-

self, trying to find an answer." She had not prepared herself for this prospect. What would happen if she made a fool of herself when they tried her on a story beyond her knowledge? At the Picayune she had watched younger women ruin their chances. And she was already close to forty. . . .

Then there was George, with his little wood-distilling plant and his dreams of a great industry. "Some of us guessed what was in her mind," says Billy Steele. "Like a young ass I spoke up. 'If it's your husband, why don't you just pack him up and take him with you?'

"She swung around, and, for the first time, I found her very angry. 'I'll have you know, Mr. Steele, that my husband isn't the kind of man you can pack up and take with you!' She walked away, and eventually we made up."

Already Dorothy had talked with Major Burbank, who urged her to accept the post. Nevertheless, reluctantly, she declined. At a later date she explained that she stayed in New Orleans out of loyalty to the Major, who had done so much for her. The Picayune veterans smiled, and one remarked: "The Major was the first to tell her to go. The truth is she was just afraid to take the plunge."

Not entirely pleased, or flattered, at the unexpected rejection, the Journal hoped she would reconsider. Meanwhile it continued to run her columns. Obviously they impressed readers; the rate of pay, phenomenal to her at the start, increased within a few weeks. . . . She had no way of knowing that the Journal soon felt a greater need of her. The editors wanted more than a weekly "Talk," and when the proper moment arrived, they would dangle more bait before the shy woman down the Mississippi.

Three months and a half later the moment arrived. Up in Kansas, Carrie Nation, the saloon-smasher, had suddenly emerged as a national figure. Everybody was arguing about her, snickering, or calling for her imprisonment. The United States wondered what she was really like; nobody had yet been able to get a convincing portrait of the difficult lady. Here, surely, would be a "woman's story."

A telegram inquired: Would Mrs. Gilmer be willing to spend a week or two tracking down Carrie Nation? The sum mentioned

looked like a windfall. Also, as Mr. Block pointed out, this was only a special assignment, from which Mrs. Gilmer could return promptly to New Orleans. She reread the last line, and swallowed the bait.

Part Two

I was on speaking terms with every criminal in America.

Dorothy Dix

Murder!

t one time Dorothy Dix wrote to a nephew:

It's true that life for most of us does begin at forty. We blunder along, making mistakes, falling down and hurting ourselves, like children learning to walk, until we get along in our early forties; and then, if there's anything in us, we get our stride and go on. I know that was so in my own case. . . .

In the icy winds of February 1901, the diminutive figure from New Orleans moved hurriedly along the streets of Topeka, trying to catch up with Mrs. Nation. Nobody had told Dorothy Dix what these winter blasts would be like, and she had not dressed for the climate. Yet on that first day in Kansas, she would have preferred to freeze rather than delay her hunt for Carrie.

She realized she was reporting an incident of national importance; Carrie Nation had started a movement that could change American social history. As she hastened on her way, Dorothy heard the whispered conversation of thugs who were lining up with brickbats and pistols, waiting for the first sight of Mrs. Nation and her ladies. The women of the opposition had hatpins or knives ready for use. The assignment would not be without danger; and Dorothy was delighted with it all.

Carrie called herself a "joint-smasher"; she did not object when others cited her as "Queen of the Hatchet." In town after town, women signed pledges to march, each with an ax, with the battle cry of "Down with the hell-hotels!" Mahogany bars had already been turned into kindling wood, and wine and bourbon had gone gurgling into the gutters.

When finally discovered, the formidable Carrie was sitting in a friend's parlor. Dorothy, who had expected almost anything, was not prepared to meet "a fat, elderly, motherly woman . . . sane, wholesome, healthy," with a plain face that broke into goodnatured wrinkles when she laughed. "The last person on earth you would think the leader of a great crusade," wrote Dorothy, "the kind of woman you have seen a thousand times serving the oyster soup or cutting the cake at village church fairs."

The dark, abundant hair was streaked with gray; the hazel eyes were clear, the mouth straight. The worn black cashmere dress had obviously been made by a country dressmaker. Around Carrie's throat was a white linen tie with embroidered ends; she held a black bag such as any elderly lady might carry. As a final touch she spoke with a "soft southern drawl." And when a woman from the Kentucky-Tennessee border remarked on that, the reader could be sure that Carrie sounded truly southern.

Dorothy chatted pleasantly with Carrie or quietly listened, managing to gain her confidence as nobody else had. She reported to her readers: "Mrs. Nation is not eloquent, and expresses herself more fluently with a hatchet than by words, but she has that strong, invincible, irresistible power that comes to those who are ready to lay down their lives, if needed, for the cause they have espoused."

Carrie announced after the first interview that she must keep a court appointment, to answer charges of destroying property. She asked Miss Dix to come along. On a bench in the courtroom Dor-

Murder! 95

othy took full notes as Carrie parried with the judge, lawyers, and police chief.

Firmly, Carrie told the police chief that it would not be necessary for her to be there if that dignitary had any backbone and enforced the law. After the questioning, Carrie, Dorothy, and the other "girls" marched through the cold to keep Carrie's next date, at which she addressed hundreds of school children. In the voice of a gentle grandmother, she told the little ones to "pick up rocks and bricks and smash every joint you see!"

Next they hurried to a legislative hearing, where Carrie clashed with another prohibitionist, one who favored submitting the issue to the voters. While Dorothy observed it all, Carrie shook her finger at him and said that—prohibitionist or not—if the man felt that way, "you're as good a friend as the devil wants. We'll hatchet you, we'll cowhide you! 'Rebuke the devil and he will flee.'"

The prohibitionist resented the suggestion that he was in league with the devil. "Don't deal in personalities, Madame."

"I never deal in generalities—they scatter too much." And Carrie took leave, bustle twitching.

That afternoon she sat down to tea with Dorothy, and Miss Dix got to the heart of her assignment: "When will you break up some more saloons?"

Carrie looked thoughtful. "I'm waiting for my voices to tell me, Miss Dix."

"Which voices?"

Carrie was stern. "Voices from God. They tell me which joints to break."

Dorothy knew then that she had her story. She began it with the words: "A modern Joan of Arc, who hears voices and sees visions and believes, like the Maid of France, that she is led by the hand of God." She went on, telling the story straight, but with occasional quirks of humor as she contrasted housewifely calm and threats of monumental wreckage.

Mrs. Nation, it seems, had prayed for a new husband when her first one, who had taken to drink, deserted her and her baby. "'Lord,' I said, 'send me a good husband. You know I can't go out

into the country and teach and leave this baby. It is a matter of indifference who he is." "But," wrote Miss Dix, "in spite of the match having been made in heaven, it doesn't appear to have been particularly happy or congenial."

Dorothy wrote that this was "the strangest and most intemperate temperance movement the world has ever seen. Mrs. Carrie Nation has begun it with her little hatchet, and her example has swept like a prairie fire from town to town, until the sound of shivering of bar fixtures rings from one end of the state to the other, and oldtimers freely predict that Kansas is to be swept by a cyclone of temperance."

She reported that the battle was fought on one side by "the elementary human thirst that refuses to be quenched by legislation or slaked by statutes"; on the other by "a vast body of women who see nothing but death and destruction in the wine glass, and are ready to fight to protect their children from it. . . ." For the next week or so she remained near Carrie, "to shout and smash when Carrie shouted and smashed, though I thought to myself," she said later, "what a waste of good liquor it was." No Kentucky girl could put her heart into the destruction of well-ripened bourbon!

At length Dorothy had so completely won Mrs. Nation's confidence that she was permitted to attend a midnight meeting. The ladies expected to march at 3 A.M., and "every one of them had a bright, new, businesslike-looking hatchet," concealed in the folds of her enveloping skirts. For more than an hour they stayed silent while Carrie prayed on her knees for a voice, only to rise and announce that the Lord wanted no saloon-smashing that night. Dorothy Dix, it is apparent, shared the ladies' groans of disappointment; she told how members of these militant "Home Defenders" accused Carrie of deserting them, of using her new notoriety as a steppingstone to the tamer lecture platform. "You're a coward," one Defender cried, shaking a fist in Carrie's face. The meeting ended in a high tizzy. "The foiled reformers were obliged to return home with their battle-axes still unbaptized in booze."

In a way that she had not quite anticipated, the Carrie Nation stories thrust Dorothy farther into the limelight. The Journal made

Murder! 97

leading features of her accounts, covering pages with banner headlines and huge drawings of a satanic-looking Carrie in the midst of joint-breakings. It presented maps marking spots where she had wrecked saloons, the place where a crowd of men had assaulted her and the one where a woman tried to horsewhip her. The Journal gave unusual credit to its correspondent. "A Woman's Picture of the 'Smasher,'" it headlined one article, and subtitled it, "Dorothy Dix, the well-known writer, tells all about the hatchet heroine."

At this point Carrie momentarily quieted down and, her assignment completed, Dorothy went home. Her Kansas experience, however, had had its effect; in contrast, New Orleans was tame. The Journal wrote to praise her stories and stated that no other newspaperman had been able to equal them. Letters arrived from all parts of the country applauding her work and asking what else she had written. They also inquired about what she would write next. This was Dorothy's pressing problem and for weeks she worried about it and discussed it with her husband.

Meanwhile, the Journal continued to make more and more attractive offers. Finally came an almost irresistible proposition—a salary of \$5,000 a year, more money than was paid the Governor of Louisiana.

Another factor influenced her, for while she was in Kansas she had received the shocking news that Nathaniel Burbank had died of a heart attack. She would no longer have the guidance of her friend and teacher; and now she could not say that loyalty to the Major held her to New Orleans.

George's plant on Perdido Street still followed an uncertain course. He had had disappointing experiences with investors, and Dorothy was contributing larger sums to the business. How could she earn this needed money and still remain in New Orleans? At last she suggested a compromise arrangement to George and to the Journal: she would go to New York for a six-month trial, and also continue her weekly article for the Picayune. George and the Journal agreed. The Picayune, glad to be able to keep her under any conditions, gave its approval.

The fullest account of her departure was offered by another paper, the New Orleans Daily States. Any irony was unconscious.

"Mr. and Mrs. Gilmer are very much attached to each other, and it was only after several months' hesitation that she decided to accept the splendid offer, couched in the most flattering terms. But Mr. Gilmer takes the keenest interest in his wife's literary work and its attendant success, and because of the exceptionally fine advantages offered her for entering broader fields he has urged her to accept." The paper stated that she was "exceedingly democratic"—a term not frequently used in describing women in those days when a lady thought it of more importance to be spoken of as a Lady. And it added, "She does not claim to be in the least way different from other women. 'Why, if I were, how could I write about them?'"

On a Saturday, March 29, 1901, she said good-by to her friends, and on Sunday George took her to the station. Again she worried about his moodiness, and wondered if it would grow worse. Yet she knew that she must leave him and take this chance, for his sake as well as her own.

On April 1 she stepped somewhat unsteadily from a trolley on the lower East Side of New York and asked directions to the Journal office. She had to bend her head against a blast of cold wind from the East River. April in New York . . . it felt like December in the South. She was frightened as well as cold. "I was so green," she remarked later, "that if there had been cows in the street, they'd have chewed at me." She decided to stay as much as possible within sight of Broadway; "It was practically the only street I knew in the bustling, careless place, and I felt safer clinging to it." And from time to time she reached down to touch a roll of bills in her stocking. "Get-home cash," she called it, in case she was fired.

She pressed on toward the ugly gray-black building in which William Randolph Hearst was engaged in his historic struggle with Joseph Pulitzer of the World. The two giant newspapers were competing for circulation by using lurid headlines and dramatic illustrations. Each paper searched for killings, suicides, any sort of mystery, hoping to interest men and women who had never read the more conservative journals.

Murder!

For Dorothy Dix, the distance from placid Woodstock of 1861 to the rush and bustle of New York newspaper life in 1901 was far more than a matter of miles. And the color of the city made New Orleans look pale. As she approached the *Journal* she saw hipswinging women of the sort who never showed themselves before dark in gay New Orleans, and East Side derelicts lounging in doorways, and cabmen who swore at her when she paused in the street.

As she entered the building the cold stares of her future colleagues further depressed her. Compared with the roar of this office, the *Picayune* and its Sunday department was as calm as a convent. Within an hour she had been taken from one upstairs cubbyhole to another. Mr. Block smiled briefly, excused himself, and sent her, to Mr. Foster Coates, the city editor, who smiled still more briefly and passed her on. Someone pointed out Mr. Brisbane—a withdrawn, awesome individual with a forehead like a perpendicular cliff.

Though Dorothy Dix had heard of the pressure of deadlines, she had never thought it would be like this. She barely made out the shouted words about fire, rapes, and Peeping Toms. Somebody pointed to a desk, one of seven or eight, mostly occupied by tobacco-chewing young men with their feet on chairs. "Three columns a week, you know—the first one due now." She went to work.

For two hours she struggled. The piece went slowly, painfully; the brusque men around her seemed not only not to care that she was there, but also not even to know it.

The next week and the next were not essentially different. Great decisions were obviously being made by such people as Mr. Brisbane and Mr. Coates. (Later she found that the air of crisis was mere routine.) The staff altered every few days, and she could never be sure of the faces. However, her greatest worry was that, although the paper certainly paid her a good salary and there appeared to be plans for setting her to a particular kind of work, nobody knew what her complete assignment would be. As she labored over her three weekly columns, she realized that the Journal considered this only part of her duties.

She began to understand that the Journal favored "positive"

stories with a certain splash and a broad appeal. For example, there were innumerable accounts of women who had trouble with their husbands, and husbands who were jealous of their wives, cases which ended in bloodshed or murder . . . She felt a certain revulsion. Suppose they plunged her into one of these?

When she made a diffident appeal to Mr. Block, he again smiled briefly; they would "think of" something for her, soon. . . . The staff gossips informed her that New York newspapers often developed great plans, brought in "names" of one kind or another, then lost interest in both the plan and the "name." The Journal had called her "the well-known writer," yet the Journal had already hired and then dispensed with the services of writers far better known than Dorothy Dix.

Still, Mr. Coates said her columns were going nicely, and a trickle of letters was coming in from New York readers. She continued to read and answer many from New Orleans, too, drawing on both cities for source material. The New York and Louisiana notes had the same tone, and asked similar questions. A few new phrases, a slang word that she did not know . . . they were the only differences. This, at least, reassured her.

Dorothy had taken a small room in a boardinghouse on 36th Street. She met a few of the other residents—a young woman poet, a singer, an actress named Ethel Barrymore. She liked Ethel and they often chatted over bowls of stew at the nearest restaurant. She was eventually to meet Ethel's brother John, under circumstances that John would prefer to forget—in a courtroom.

At home she would pore over the Journal for hours, just as she had over the Picayune, puzzling why some stories had been played up, others slighted. And the New York letters interested her increasingly. A girl from a poor neighborhood told how she wanted to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge. Dorothy looked at the letter closely and realized that the address was only a short distance from her boardinghouse.

Several times she had passed alleyways leading into slums such as she had never imagined existed. She contrasted this part of New York with the surroundings of great restaurants such as Delmonico's and Sherry's, and the champagne night life that friends on the

Murder!

paper mentioned so cynically. She had also walked by the entrance of the Tombs and seen the women prisoners clutching the barred windows. . . . Luxury and hunger and heartbreak . . .

The letters she received emphasized the fact that New York was a capital of bitterness as well as joy. To her the correspondence meant more than ever. She almost memorized the notes as she debated what to advise one, how to change the depressed mood of another.

She became worried about her own position when she was asked to act as secretary for one of the Journal executives for a part of each day. She had done nothing of the kind since she had helped her father nearly twenty years earlier. The work turned out to be routine. Could it be a preliminary to dismissal, or a move to place her on a dusty shelf?

A tragedy in New Jersey put an end to this routine. She was taking dictation at her new part-time post when City Editor Coates telephoned her. He spoke crisply: "Come right down. We want you to go out of town on a story."

Her skirts flapping, she almost ran to his office. "New Jersey woman's supposed to have murdered a baby—her husband's by a first marriage," he said. "Girl three years old; good family and all that. A lot of people are going to be interested. Don't lose any time, and wire everything. Here's an order on the cashier."

An out-of-town assignment had always meant time to pack a bag, instruct the landlady, and make other arrangements. But already Mr. Coates was on the phone again, and Dorothy made up her mind: no questions, no extra shirtwaists, no delays. Get to that place, and get there fast!

She tucked away her expense money and sped downstairs and into City Hall Park. Ahead stood a policeman. With a wavering voice she asked how to reach the town in New Jersey. As she memorized her directions, she thought of telling him that she was a newspaperwoman headed for a murder case. She did not dare to, for "had he laughed, I would have collapsed."

On the train she remembered her fear of being sent on such a story. Here was the test. A few hours later she climbed out of a gig at the courthouse, and faced a glowering policeman. No reporter could see the defendant; no, they couldn't say anything about the charge. No, she couldn't talk to anybody else here.

Next she tried to see the woman's family. At the large, well-maintained double house a door opened, then slammed. She had spent forty minutes and had learned nothing. Should she have acted in the traditional manner of hard-boiled young newspapermen and tried to force her way in? But that wasn't her method and she was afraid she could never make it hers.

She got back into the gig and said to the driver, "Let's just ride around a bit." As he drove along he began to point out places to her: "That's where she lived. When she was a teacher, you see. Used to call on her myself."

Dorothy Dix's eyes widened. "You mean you knew her?" And she proceeded with all her skill to draw him out. Oh, yes, he knew a lot about that stepmother and her baby. Would Miss Dix like to meet other people who knew more than he did? Miss Dix certainly would. He took her to see doctors, an undertaker, neighbors, and several people who defended the accused. Meanwhile, the gig driver found a large picture of the lady.

The result was a story packed with facts, a detailed description of the case and of the community and its attitude. Dorothy described the handsome woman who had lived all of her life within a few miles of the town. Her parents had made sacrifices in order to educate her; quick-witted, adaptive, she had gone to normal school, and taught for several years. Then her best friend married a traveling man—"rather handsome, well dressed and sporty looking"—but died when her daughter was eighteen months old. Shortly afterward, the teacher married the widower. They had their own baby, and now the young wife was pregnant again. This was the woman under arrest for murdering her stepchild.

Neighbors described to Dorothy Dix how they had often heard the child crying; and some said they had seen the stepmother brutally beating her. The occupant of the other half of the twofamily house added that on the night before the girl's death, the child had screamed so much he had pounded on the wall and threatened to break in. A maid claimed she had left rather than be a witness to "more of this." She insisted that the child had Murder! 103

frequently been locked in the cellar, and then forced to stand upstairs in a corner with her hands tied behind her back.

Finally a doctor reported that he was called in by the stepmother and told the child was ill. First she said that the girl had a cold, then that she was having spasms. At the house he discovered her dead, badly bruised, lip cut open, nose broken "flat with the face." When the doctor declined to certify a burial certificate, the coroner signed one. After the funeral a suspicious uncle arrived from another city; the body was exhumed, and examination indicated arsenic in the stomach.

On the other hand, the stepmother's friends told Dorothy that the child had always been sickly, suffered fits, and frequently fell. On the night of her death she had simply rolled down the stairs and suffered the injuries which were later reported. As for the arsenic, it must have been introduced by the embalmer. Though no arsenic was used in the preparation of the girl's body, they insisted it had remained in the syringe from a previous embalming.

Meanwhile, however, the mechanics of filing her story had puzzled Dorothy. She hunted out a telegraph office, then stared at a typewriter. Should she save money by cutting out all the unimportant words and phrases and skeletonizing the account into a series of bulletins? She started to do it in this manner, but it sounded wrong. . . .

"So I decided I'd put in every single word even if I broke the Journal's bank roll. Eighteen hundred words . . . As I handed the sheets to the man, I felt scared. Had I written myself out of a job? Then, with the help of the gig-driver, I located the only boarding place in town, and tried without success to sleep. For twenty-four hours I waited to be called down, or back to New York. The next night I trembled when I opened a telegram. It said 'Great work!' and told me to stay there." She suspected that from now on she would never again be frightened on an assignment.

She would remember the occasion for another special reason. When she was preparing to leave the town, she received the second marriage proposal of her life. At the station, the helpful gig-driver dropped the reins and said with emotion: "Ma'am, I own this horse and carriage outright, and practically own another one. I

make every bit of a hundred dollars a month. The minute I saw you, I knew I wanted to marry you. I can make you a good husband, and you'll never have to run after beaten babies and such."

Dorothy was touched. "He got quite damp around the eyes, and me—I was thrilled clear to my toes. But I pulled the oldest line in the world; I told him I was wedded to my art." Accepting sadly, he assured her that if she ever changed her mind, she had only to wire him, "and he'd meet me at the train with one of those two gigs."

Back at the Journal she was received as a celebrity. Foster Coates rushed out and clasped her hands; Mr. Block beamed. Old reporters grinned in admiration and young ones looked on with surprise. By their expressions she knew they wondered how such a quiet little hen could have done it. And when they showed her the papers—full-page spreads with pictures of stepmother and baby, the house and diagrams—there in bigger letters than she had ever seen were the words "By Dorothy Dix."

A little later Mr. Coates called her in and asked a great many questions. She told of her early seclusion at Woodstock, and how she had never been in a city larger than Nashville or at the theater until she was twenty. With this he thumped his desk: "Now I understand you and your work! You've got a mature, trained mind, but also the keenness of a child. Practically everything is new and wonderful to you, and you can give it that fresh view of yours."

The editor was correct only to a degree. The Dix copy had freshness and clarity. However, it was the experience she had with her own problems and the practice she had in giving advice in her columns to troubled men and women which brought her unusual insight and understanding.

Two or three days later she was given an assignment in Washington. A young dental student had been found shot to death in a hotel, and a middle-aged married woman was accused of the murder.

For Mrs. Lois Bonine, whose husband loyally protested her innocence, Dorothy Dix had a certain ready sympathy. Here was a woman about her own age—frail, well-educated, of obvious

Murder!

breeding, and the mother of a boy of fifteen and another of ten. Like Dorothy herself, Lois Bonine had had troubles. Mr. Bonine, a salesman for a Chicago firm, suffered an accident to his eyes; he would soon be blind.

Dorothy described the efforts of the thrifty Mrs. Bonine to "keep up appearances and make the most of a dollar," and also to prepare herself for a post-office job before darkness closed about her husband. Guests at the Kenmore apartment hotel had often spoken of her devotion to her family. They recalled that Lois and her husband were frequently seen with a young student, Jim Ayres. When Mr. Bonine's duties took him away, Lois occasionally had luncheon or tea with him.

She had only a mother's interest in the boy's welfare, some said; on that point, there was disagreement. When Jim Ayres began to be short-tempered and moody, it was whispered that he drank too much. One night, without telling the management, he packed his trunk; he was heard to say he had an "enemy" in the hotel and would leave in the morning.

Dorothy Dix explained how attendants found Jim Ayres shot to death, with bloody smudges on the curtains and walls of his room. "The Red Hand Mystery," the newspapers labeled it. Whose hand? For days police questioned Lois Bonine, and she insisted she knew nothing of Jim's death. No, she had not been in love with the boy; scornfully she denied everything, and invited detectives to her rooms, to take fingerprints and examine anything they wished.

Now, however, maids and guests testified to seeing Mrs. Bonine in Jim's room and hearing them quarrel. Mrs. Bonine frowned. Why, yes, she had called on Jim with the best of intentions; they had quarreled, certainly, over his drinking. Any older woman interested in his well-being would have done the same thing. Dorothy Dix told how Lois retained her composure despite daily inquisitions. "Every new suggestion, every new question, must have been a torment, but she never wavered."

Mrs. Bonine calmly pointed out the impossibility of committing the murder according to the police theory. To have done that, she pointed out, she would have had to climb out the window of the boy's room, go down a fire escape in the glare of an electric light where anyone might have seen her, then make her way along the corridor to her room.

The weight of evidence grew, and finally the harassed suspect broke down. She confessed that she shot Jim, and escaped from the room just as the police charged. Dorothy Dix observed: "For cool nerve and daring the deed has seldom been excelled." Yet Lois had an explanation: that night Jim had gone to her room, half-drunk, and tried to put his arms around her. She thrust him away and he insisted she follow him to his chamber. She did, and there he tried to attack her; she had killed him in self-defense.

Dorothy Dix did not think much of this final version. "To a woman it seems that she did not explain her presence in that room," and Mrs. Bonine admitted that she had been warned of the boy's strong feeling for her. There could come a time in a married woman's life, Dorothy reasoned, when she longed for new love, and she might find it in a younger man. But surely, she must always be aware that some day he would leave her for someone younger and prettier; that he would become bored, while she cried and eventually threatened. . . . No, to another woman, Mrs. Bonine's version was obviously false.

For many, Dorothy Dix's frank words were a new and exciting kind of reporting. Others had a simple explanation for her approach—she was a man, writing under a pen name. She smiled and said: "It was, I suppose, a nice, unintended compliment."

CHAPTER 8

New York—New Orleans Shuttle

he six-month period of work for the New York Journal was almost at an end. In the evenings, as Dorothy Dix stared out of the blank square of her boardinghouse window at the noisy New York thoroughfare, she saw instead broad Canal Street in New Orleans, or the curving reaches of St. Charles Avenue, with leaves drifting across the brick banquettes. She thought, too, of the friends among whom she had lived in the leisurely city, and then of the tense, hurrying people with whom she now worked. Only of late had she realized how truly pleasant New Orleans had been, and how much she liked its quiet pace, its generous ways.

And still . . . here lay her career, her future or a large part of it. Sometime she would want to retire to the South for the rest of her days, but not yet. For her, New York had the zest of adventure, the challenge of widening opportunity. Every few weeks saw another big story break, and the way she handled such assignments brought her increasing praise.

On the other hand, her husband had grown restless; he asked

when she planned to come home. Surely, he said, Dorothy had had enough of whatever she did up there. Between the lines of his letters, as she explained later, she read an unhappy truth: George's business had slumped. She continued to help financially, but before long the affairs of their turpentine plant, into which Dorothy had invested much of her funds, approached a turning point. Never a man for operational details, George found the business increasingly difficult to handle.

Already Dorothy had conferred about the matter with her brother Ed in Tennessee, and now George agreed with her that Ed should go to New Orleans to take over the management. Ed brought in fresh capital, and a practical mind. The change required a certain adjustment on George's part, yet Dorothy by letter succeeded in bringing that about. She also wrote to encourage him in another venture, the invention of a rotary gas engine, and into this new channel he turned more and more of his energies.

Now Dorothy could feel more secure about the turpentine plant—she had always been particularly fond of Ed—but she still had to put up most of her capital. Although New York prices ate up a large part of her pay, in these days she had a little more money, for her columns were appearing in all the Hearst papers and were being syndicated by dozens of others around the country.

Then, for a time, she had no leisure to consider her own problems. The paper sent her traveling again, on the "Fosburgh Affair" in Massachusetts—a strange and involved manslaughter case which had stirred public interest for many months. As she started for Massachusetts she read over her notes about the affair.

A year or so earlier, in the town of Pittsfield, screams and commotion had been heard at midnight at the home of the Fosburghs, wealthy contractors from St. Louis; police discovered the young daughter of the house lying across the threshold of her room, a bullet in her heart.

The father and the son, Robert, had bruised faces and blackened eyes, and they bore other marks of a struggle. The nightgown worn by Robert's wife had been ripped to shreds, and she and the other women cried hysterically. All of the Fosburghs, including the distraught daughter-in-law, said that three masked bandits had broken in, and the two men had grappled with the intruders. When the daughter ran in, she had been shot; then the burglars jumped through a window and escaped.

But the town gossiped: everybody had caught whispers of trouble among the Fosburghs. The daughter-in-law had come from a poorer family. The older Mrs. Fosburgh had never approved of her, and when they quarreled, the son had taken his mother's side. . . . Then the police investigated and found that a revolver, apparently the death weapon, had belonged to Robert himself. Evidence pointing to burglars, which the family produced, was severely questioned.

In Pittsfield, Dorothy went to the hotel at which the Fosburghs awaited their son's trial. "To know a man you should first know his people," was one of her beliefs, and she managed to talk with the Fosburghs as no one else had. She sent a brief, tactful message to the cultured mother of the young man, and won permission to visit the assembled family.

Mrs. Fosburgh, granting the interview, had made it clear that she could hardly discuss the case. When she saw Dorothy, however, she did. She explained how she had awakened to see masked figures standing over her, "and then came the shot and the terrible shock of finding the girl dead." The mother felt certain that Robert would be proved innocent.

Quietly in the background of the case waited that other woman, the daughter-in-law. Dorothy speculated, echoing the town's questions: Would Robert's wife deny the state's contention that he had quarreled with her, that his father intervened, and that in the midst of the fracas the Fosburgh girl had been accidentally shot? She wondered at the attitude of the older woman; how could a mother show such love and tenderness toward her boy if he had killed his sister?

The town split over the issue, and Miss Dix pictured the antagonism between the two factions. Pleading illness, the district attorney refused to handle the case. The medical examiner who was the Fosburghs' family doctor died almost at once, and the town blamed his death on the strain of his embarrassing position. Yet the Fosburghs themselves continued united, and the daughter-in-law

steadfastly and solemnly confirmed the family version of the killing.

The judge directed that any reference to the Fosburghs' remarks about the family row should be struck from the record. At one point he made another ruling. Annoyed at the way the press was investigating and speculating, he ordered all reporters to leave the room. Delightedly, the *Journal* ran a drawing showing the newspapermen marching out in a long file—with Dorothy Dix demurely near the head of the line!

The case ended when the judge directed the jury to give a verdict in favor of young Fosburgh, and the matter remained as much a mystery as when it began. Eight years later, however, Dorothy Dix shook her head when she learned that the daughter-in-law had sued Robert Fosburgh for separation. The young wife told nothing of the events leading up to the shooting, but she gave a complete picture of bitter family antagonisms, confirming what the town had long suspected. The mother-in-law had nursed a hatred of her, ignoring her at the table as a "social inferior," teaching her daughters to snub her, and Robert had taken his mother's side. If such facts had been revealed at the trial, there might have been a different story. Yet the case had been closed, and it stayed closed. . . .

Immediately after the Fosburgh trial Dorothy Dix found herself close to the heart of a national calamity. When a fanatic fired at President McKinley, she hurried to Buffalo, where Mrs. McKinley, "whose gentle invalidism had hung always about the White House," prayed for her husband's recovery. In her accounts of the First Lady's vigil Dorothy told how the sickly woman, who had often needed help to cross a room, acquired the strength that arose from necessity, as she tried to support her husband's will to live.

In simple and moving passages the correspondent told about Mrs. McKinley's invalidism, brought on by the death of their baby. Her husband, rising steadily in public affairs, had nursed her through the years, devoting all of his free time to her. Mrs. McKinley had hoped he would not run a second time, and had looked forward to the day when they could return to a small house in Canton, where the child had been buried. "It is of this dream that she is thinking as she bends over the white, drawn face on the pillow . . . and millions all over the country are praying that the

President's life will be spared and that her dream will come true." Mrs. McKinley's dream was never realized. A week later Dorothy Dix went to Albany, to report the movements of the new First Lady, Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt. She came back on a steamer with T.R.'s wife, noting how most of the passengers seemed unsure who Mrs. Roosevelt was; the President's wife behaved much like the wife of any bank clerk returning from a summer outing. Young Alice, Kermit, and Theodore walked casually along the decks like any other children.

Already, however, Dorothy Dix saw nervous strain in the face of the new First Lady. Her eyes, shadowed by a veil, looked as if she had not slept. On shore she spoke briefly to Miss Dix, then went on to her house at Oyster Bay. Here would be no pale shadow in the White House, Dorothy predicted, but a young woman "vigorous and vital in her interests and ambitions . . . a woman who has what New England people call 'faculty,' and more anxious for her husband's advancement than the man himself." It is an illuminating portrait.

After such reporting the Journal management had no wish to lose Miss Dix to New Orleans or any other place, and it made its interest plain with a raise. It also suggested that she return to Louisiana to clear up her personal matters (after she had written her columns in advance, of course).

In New Orleans, between her meetings with such friends as Helen Pitkin, Mr. Kendall, and Mr. Rapier, she and George Gilmer faced their problems. Again they agreed that he needed financial help from her for his factory; and this meant she must work in New York. As often as they could manage it, he would go to New York or she would come home. While this arrangement had its difficulties, they would try to work it out.

Back at the Journal once more, she was quickly aware that her future had been discussed by the Big Boss himself. In the past she had spoken briefly, and not altogether comfortably, with Mr. Hearst when he made his spectacular descents upon the office. As some said, he edited the paper "by foot," spreading dummy sheets on the floor and walking back and forth to get a better view. Now Miss Dix was summoned to the royal presence. She sat nervously

opposite him and heard "Willie" Hearst's plans for her. To a greater extent than ever she would cover crimes and investigations. He had read her reports of murder trials; he liked them and he wanted more.

Her employer lectured her. Such trials were American detective stories, and people liked detective stories, mystery, drama, human passions. Why else was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle so enormously successful? Hearst hoped to see the stories handled more and more as Doyle might. . . . She nodded. For her, of course, there was nothing new in such advice; she had understood without being told. But it was clear what direction her career would take.

At the same time Dorothy learned more about the hitherto mysterious Mr. Brisbane. He, too, had plans for shaping Miss Dix's career. She had watched him angle stories of murders so that the circulation jumped 75,000 or 100,000 a day. She had seen him hatch wonders out of nothing—or less than nothing. She marveled at his ingenuity; while most people had few original thoughts, she concluded, Brisbane had almost too many.

New ideas, suggestions for stories came to him in such floods that they swept the bewildered listener off his feet and often left the dazed reporter wondering which one to follow, and whether to pack his bag for Timbuctoo or write a heart-throb story about the love life of the squirrels in Central Park. Mr. Brisbane could have made either full of life and color, and with a good moral attached, as well as grippingly interesting.

Brisbane called Dorothy to his desk and spoke in sharp, staccato sentences. He approved of her approach, her feeling. Still . . . he suggested a greater simplicity. He had been truly delighted to see Miss Dix's work free of the curlicues and fripperies of most writing. Nevertheless, he shook his finger at her:

"Remember that a newspaper is read mostly by very busy people, or very tired people or uneducated people. None of them is going to hunt a dictionary to find out what it means." Dorothy looked solemn, and he went on: "If you don't hit a newspaper reader between the eyes with your first sentence, there's no need of writing a second. I always write with my old German housekeeper before

me, and if I think she'd miss the meaning of a sentence, I write it over again, in a clearer form, with fewer big words."

Though Miss Dix already knew what he was driving at, Arthur Brisbane as usual took no chances. From then on, he assured her she would be under his eye. Others whispered to her that this would be no delight, and cited the man's whims, his frequent foibles, his fantastic "scientific" theories.

Many times he told her of his conviction that the "best" children were born of a young mother and a much older father. This he put into practice in his own home. Also, believed Brisbane, the father should be brilliant—like him; the wife, healthy and non-intellectual. This, too, he tried to carry out.

"Once in a while," the late Keats Speed recalled from his Journal days, "the paper asked her to try something absurd—a different 'angle,' a 'twist.' We smiled around the office when she showed them the result. It usually came out so silly that they gave up. Miss Dix could be quite reasonable, and also quite firm when she wished."

Such was the case of the "Brisbane hat." The editor decided he understood more about women's headgear than women did—a typical Brisbane boast. He evolved an "ideal ultilitarian hat" that would be in style at all times and suit all weather and all purposes. A weird object, it went up here, down there. And as a generous concession to the ladies, it was trimmed with a tiny ribbon. Brisbane displayed a drawing of it to several people, who said afterward that they knew at once it was supposed to be a hat; it said so underneath.

He took the curiosity to Dorothy, and asked her to wear it so that the world could see its value. Miss Dix looked startled, said she would, and never did. Perhaps she realized that he would soon forget the matter, or become absorbed in another idea. In any case, as an old-timer remembers, "Any of us would have given odds that she'd never put on that nightmare."

However, Dorothy Dix gave Brisbane his due. She soon learned that with him "the paper was the thing. Nothing else really mattered. He could work anywhere at any time under any circumstances, turning out incredible amounts of copy, and the only thing

he could never understand was why any cub reporter could not do likewise. To him, the unforgivable sin was to fall down on a story, and his 'good stuff' was an encomium that made any member of his staff feel as if he or she had the accolade."

By 1902, Brisbane publicly proclaimed Dorothy's work as "good stuff." In a long editorial he cited her as one of the newspaper stars of the day. He asked: "Did any man make quicker or more decided success in newspaper work than Dorothy Dix?"

She was working harder than ever and always arrived before others at the office. When young women sought her advice about working on a newspaper, she asked them:

Have you the constitution of an ox? Can you go without sleep? Can you eat anything, or go without eating, work anywhere, no matter what the conditions? Can you do away with moods and tenses, and stay on a story through rain and shine and dark news and cold until you have collected every scrap of information? Can you work eighteen hours a day?—I did all of these things for many years.

As the months passed she made one trip after another to New Orleans. Each time she feared a crisis with George; each time she averted it. She talked him into a better mood, helped to adjust the factory's affairs, then returned to New York and her new assignments.

About this time Dorothy Dix interviewed the world's champion of bigamists. The city editor tossed a sheet on her desk and grinned: "Dorothy, here's a honey of a story for you. Man that's had thirty-six wives. I'm sure you'd like to talk to him!"

Dorothy agreed. At last she was going to see a Lothario of Lotharios. If he told her a third of what he knew about women . . . She had dozens of questions, and a large pad of paper. As she walked toward his cell (one of the ladies, in an unsportsmanlike mood, had turned the fellow in) she prepared herself for an Apollo.

Instead, she found "a little, weedy, shabby rat of a man who looked as though he had been moth-eaten and left out in the rain overnight." For once Miss Dix's ladylike upbringing left her, and she blurted out:

"You've married thirty-six women?"

"Yes, Miss Dix."

"Do you mind telling me how the devil you did it?"

The mouse of a man smiled at her. "It's the easiest thing in the world, Miss Dix. All you've got to do is talk to them about themselves!"

Long afterward she remembered that remark, for in a way it was a remarkable lesson in human relations. The bigamist had said something that many others might take to heart.

The stacks of mail for Dorothy Dix in the New York office grew even higher than they had in New Orleans—so high that she began to worry how she could find time to read all the letters. She rejected the suggestion that certain members of the staff "assist" her. She feared the day when an unwise person, or a flippant one, might make use of one of the tragic messages.

An increasing number of the letters arrived from people who gave no addresses. They did not seek direct advice; they wanted primarily the relief of telling their troubles to someone who was understanding. Perhaps, they added, she would make some general comment about their problems in her column. "I suppose I'm becoming a kind of safety valve," she said. "There might be worse things to be!"

Her columns frequently attacked traditional customs. One of them entitled "Getting Married Later in Life" said: "Every year we see fewer examples of that always pitiful spectacle of a girl taking a flying leap from the cradle to the altar, making vows she is too much of a child to understand, too often in her ignorance fastening the millstone about her neck that is to crush out all the sweetness and joy of living." An older girl, who had seen more of the world, would know at least what she wanted in a husband. "She may not always get it, but at least she makes her bargain in the market with open eyes."

The Journal believed in working its stars, and also in adding the appeal of their names to various departments of the paper. Although Dorothy had written drama reviews for the Picayune, she rebelled when Hearst first proposed that she do them for the Jour-

nal. She really knew nothing about theater technique, she protested. "All the better," he answered. "Most critics take three-fourths of their space to tell how much they know and give only a paragraph of what really happens at the play."

Reluctantly she agreed, and wrote what might be termed feature stories about the plays. While she expressed her opinions, and forthrightly at times, she gave most of her attention to a lively description of the proceedings: stage sets, the actress' personality, a philosophy suggested by the leading character.

She found Anna Held in The Little Duchess chic rather than naughty. Describing a beach scene, she thought it "undressed to the Asbury Park limit" with "a deliciously thrilling moment when a quartet of pretty chorus girls haul off their long black silk stockings and wave them at the audience. . . . But they wave them in French, and that makes all the difference, you know."

On the other hand, Miss Dix considered Mrs. Patrick Campbell disappointing when she appeared in a series of problem plays exploiting the "cheerful theory that the woman with a past cannot have a present." Mrs. Campbell was a polished actress, yet she failed to touch the audience's heart. Ellen Terry, Henry Irving, George Arliss . . . Dorothy appraised them one by one.

Her readers were amused by her reviews of such experiments as an Aïda sung in English. Opera in English—a fine idea, she said, and a boon to the "uncultivated," who usually paid good money to hear singers calling to one another in Volapuk. However, that night the opera might just as well have been sung in Sanscrit. "Now and then a familiar word would slip out, but such breaks were so infrequent and unintentional that they did not mar the sacred opera traditions of unintelligibility." In her opinion, the show was stolen by a group of American Negro "Ethiopians" who swaggered so engagingly in uniform that the audience forgot tenor and soprano.

Keats Speed considered Dorothy Dix a "wonder-worker" at the Journal. "We wondered how she had time to do it all. When she hit her desk she seemed to have decided, on the way down, just what she would say. Sometimes two men were setting her work at the machines, and occasionally a third one, a theater story."

Like a juggler, she kept several things going at the same time. And she had to be ready at any moment to rush to the distant scene of a murder, or perhaps to investigate a report that a girl on lower Fifth Avenue was in the clutches of a white-slave ring. They had to explain to her, at first, precisely what a "white-slave ring" was. She took the information in stride and years later commented:

I never found one girl yet who went to the white-slavers for any reason except that she wanted to. Those white-slave cases are much like cases in the 1920s when a girl told her parents that an unidentified brute seized her and cut off her hair. Usually you find the parents wouldn't let her bob her hair, and she did it herself and cooked up the story to save herself a spanking.

Sometimes, returning at five P.M. from a six-day trip, Dorothy would discover a peremptory note on her desk: "You're behind schedule with the columns. Will you do two for this week before you leave the building"? . . . In addition to the columns she wrote a series of light articles, one by "Belle Blitz," a slangy secretary, another called "Fables of the Elite," fiction for the New York Journal, articles for Cosmopolitan and other magazines, and, on top of all that, a series in dialect known as "Mirandy Stories." Mirandy was a Negro mammy who expressed herself in this way:

"A baby is a mighty handy thing to have around de house. Hit's 'bout de best excuse for a really lazy, slack woman dat ever was invented, caze dy ain't nothin' dat you do, or leaves undone, dat you can't lay on de baby."

The "Mirandy" stories had an almost unbelievable vogue at the time, and were published in book form. When the London Daily Mail reprinted them, it carried a note declaring that in her Mammy character Dorothy had provided a rival for "Mr. Dooley, whose shrewd and quaintly expressed views of men and things long ago became famous." Dialect is, of course, perishable stuff; for a modern reader the Mirandy pieces do not present Dorothy Dix in her best light. Even in that day a friendly interviewer slipped in the remark that Miss Dix suffered from the delusion that the Mirandy stuff was her best work.

"Thinking back, the curious thing is how quietly Dorothy managed it all," Keats Speed observed. "We had prima donnas who flounced in with colored parasols like Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and dramatic-looking stage directors, and preachers who wrote about vice (against it, of course). We had characters galore—people the staff gaped at and speculated about. None of them approached Dorothy in what they did, yet after a time some of us took her for granted. She went on and on, year after year, and in a way that was a miracle."

Her "Fables of the Elite" proved so popular that they were eventually published in book form. The characters were animals and parodied men and women in their human failings. They contained such quips as "'There are just as good Fish in the Sea as have Ever Been Caught,' the Tigress reflected, 'and, thank Heaven, I have not Lost my Bait.' . . . Now Mr. Bear had not intended to be Unkind or Neglectful to his Wife. He merely forgot that, being a Female, she belonged to the Cat Family, and could not help her nature, which leads her to Snuggle up to Warm Things and Scratch Back when anyone Rubs the Fur the Wrong Way." The book was considered clever, and a contribution to the slang literature of the day.

Between assignments, Dorothy had time to include her feminine taste. She acquired a number of "special dresses," and photographs reveal new touches—a high ornament on a hat, a frilled blouse that she would not have chosen in New Orleans. And she had a more sophisticated eye for style and manners, as was shown in her next big assignment.

The trial of Florence Burns focused attention on the problems of "teen-agers" in Brooklyn in 1902.

By the time he was seventeen, Walter Brooks—a handsome, dark boy—was so attractive to women that he had acquired almost a professional rating as a Casanova. "Since the beginning of the world," Dorothy Dix wrote, "that type of man has had only to beckon and woman has followed, and she always will." He was naturally alluring to pretty Florence Burns, a one-time office worker and model. (In the 1900s the latter was a somewhat scandalous occupation.)

Florence's middle-class family objected to her seeing Walter Brooks, and when she disobeyed them, they locked her out. Ill and frightened, Florence went to the Brooks house. Here she stayed for a time until Walter tired of her and announced his intention of marrying another woman.

When Walter was found shot to death in a hotel room, a girl who answered Florence's description had been seen with him, and Florence was arrested.

At the girl's trial for murder Dorothy Dix had a front seat in the courtroom. As the story of youthful infatuation unfolded she took occasion to lecture American parents:

"We are accustomed to think of the stormy passions of life as belonging to maturity, but here are a boy and girl, gently born and gently reared, who at an age when other boys are absorbed in college pranks and other girls are getting their first long frocks and beginning to do up their hair, have run the gamut of experience." To Dorothy Dix, the situation was a commentary on the system under which American youth was being brought up. Though technically the pair were children, they had become much more sophisticated than their parents. The girl's family had allowed her to "feel like a heroine" in a pulp story. To this, Dorothy added: "Even in a murderer's cell she can still pose like the dopey heroine of her beloved dopey novel."

Then the writer drew on her Louisiana readings and cited the story by George Cable in which a priest, hearing of a crime, exclaimed: "May God forgive you and me, my brother, for this man's sins." Foolish American parents as a whole, she suggested, might be blamed for the Florence Burns case. Most of the readers knew hundreds of girls like Florence, whose parents neglected them. The parents themselves could not understand their daughters and made no attempt really to know them.

Dorothy Dix reported that on the witness stand the girl acted "as if the matter was one of no interest or importance to her."

The pistol which killed Brooks could not be produced, and this was an important point in Florence's favor. Also, her lawyers confused witnesses in their identification of the girl and their description of how she had been dressed. The next day Dorothy pointed

out that almost no man could provide reliable testimony about a woman's attire. He would say any dark dress was black; he did not discriminate between shades; and he could never give an accurate description of the shape of a girl's hat. Yet a woman, "trained by habit and instinct and heredity to a close examination of another woman's clothes, will pass a sister on the street, and with one backward, all-embracing glance, take a fair inventory of everything she has on and what it cost."

When the defense suggested that Walter had killed himself Miss Dix quoted: "'Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love,'" and added: "When a man commits suicide it is about money, not for a woman's love."

Then she said precisely what many were thinking. Guilty or not, Florence would never be convicted. America, she pointed out, had an unwritten law that not only justified a woman in becoming her own avenger, but also "condoned any crime in a woman provided she is young and beautiful. . . . It is practically impossible to convict a young and good-looking woman. An American jury is the double-distilled extract of American gallantry. . . . When the law and the lady come in conflict, the law generally goes under."

Let this situation persist, thought Miss Dix, and every hysterical girl with a real or imaginary wrong would "start out with her pistol and no man would be safe." She had a suggestion—women jurors. A girl's beauty would not sway a female jury, though it might incline them to understand her folly. "None know so well as women that homeliness is its own chaperon, and that a girl of rare and striking perfection of face and form is beset by temptations that never assail her ugly sisters."

Furthermore, a woman's tears would be wasted on women jurors, who would recognize them as "a chemical that dissolves the average man's backbone, common sense and determination, and turn him into pulp." The ladies on the jury would no doubt remember how often they themselves had cried to win an argument. In matters of affections, too, a male jury tended to take the romantic view that woman was always the pursued, man the pursuer. This, of course, was nonsense, Dorothy noted.

"On the whole it seems probable that women who commit

crimes would get a great deal more justice and a great deal less mercy if they were tried by woman juries."

That same month the conclusion of the New Jersey case of the woman accused of murdering her stepchild bore out Miss Dix's argument. She pictured for her readers the manner in which the woman charged with the offense sat for hours like a Madonna with her own child in her lap, kissing him frequently, whispering loving words. The accused was handsome in a black silk gown with "a stylish white Panama hat, becomingly trimmed." The male jurors obviously found it all touching; the women in the courtroom stared icy disapproval.

When the judge charged the jury he almost commanded a verdict of guilty. But Dorothy had taken her measure of the twelve: they looked stupid and they acted stupidly, she said. When they tramped back in, the foreman read a verdict of not guilty. "You could have heard the gasp of astonishment." Near the jury box sat some of the jurors' families. As soon as the case was over, the wife of the foreman stepped forward and, "with every ounce of her strength, slapped her juror-husband a stinging blow in the face, that sounded like the dropping of an unabridged dictionary on a hard-wood floor!"

Even in 1902, a lady could express an opinion.

CHAPTER 9

Florodora to "Little Italy"

he extent of Dorothy Dix's popularity was shown when she went to her employers a year later and announced she must leave New York. She said it simply and directly; there were "compelling reasons" why she must return to New Orleans for an indefinite period.

The Journal officials made strenuous objections. Miss Dix must be crazy; she had a great future here. And certainly the management had shown their appreciation? She agreed with this, but she was adamant and repeated that she must return home. Still they would not let her resign.

The result was another compromise. She would write her regular columns and features in New Orleans, and try to organize her affairs so that, after a time, she would be free to leave immediately to cover important crime stories. Neither she nor the *Journal* felt enthusiastic about the plan; it would be difficult for both.

The "compelling reasons" were the usual difficulties with George, who was becoming more and more bitter and unreason-

able. His work kept him in New Orleans and he wanted Dorothy there, too. But the factory had not yet shown any marked success, and she must continue her financial help in one way or another. As she told her friends: "It wasn't a matter of my career against George's. I just couldn't afford to give up my salary."

She might not be able to do everything the Journal asked. And, as Brisbane indicated, there would also be times when even the fastest train would be too slow, and the assignment must go to someone else. Nevertheless, even if her career suffered, it would have to be that way. . . .

They took half a double house at 1617 Jackson Avenue, near St. Charles. For the time being, at least, Dorothy had what she had once wanted—the chance to establish her own home. That would be good for George and for her as well. On her calling card she had printed Mrs. George O. Gilmer. The "Dorothy Dix" part of herself would not be allowed to intrude.

Referring to that phase of her life, she told an interviewer: "In New Orleans, I meditate on the destinies of the domestic state, on the ten commandments of love, on frowsiness, on frumps, and how not to be them. In New York, my work and thoughts are of battle, murder and sudden death." Eventually she was able to organize this new existence so that she could make the trips to New York almost as often as the Journal wished. But it must have been a tiring schedule. She told a friend she shuttled between New York and New Orleans so often, she believed she could recognize every railroad tie on the route.

An observant Orleanian says that when she passed the Gilmer house in the evening, "if I glanced in, I saw them in almost identical places—she under the light with a book or magazine in her hand, he in the corner, just sitting there. They never seemed to talk; each had his own world. And in the daytime, they went out separately. It was unusual to see them paying a call together."

Another woman recalls that she met Dorothy at the old New Orleans Woman's Club when she frequently attended daytime sessions. Once in a while the club held night meetings and members were expected to bring their husbands. "We partly wanted to show the men that we neither pulled hair nor cooled over cream puffs.

And we also liked to show our husbands off a bit." The Gilmers never appeared.

Others knew better than to inquire of Dorothy about the matter. "Because I was young and new in New Orleans, I stopped her and asked her point-blank. She looked surprised: 'Oh, he'd never do that.' There was a little hurt in her face, but when she saw that I had become confused, she smoothed the matter over. 'Mr. Gilmer hasn't been well. He has a lot of worries, and this kind of thing hasn't appealed to him anyway.' And she left."

George Gilmer's physical condition had grown worse. He began to suffer arthritic attacks, which were to recur with the years. Walking was difficult and he hobbled slightly to lessen the pressure on his feet. A man who paid an unexpected visit, hoping to talk to Dorothy Dix about her work, was met at the door by George—his face pale and wet. "It took him so long to get there that I understood he had some sort of trouble with his legs. When I apologized, he smiled and made no explanation."

George's new illness increased his moodiness and his resentment of his wife's fame. She told friends that when she came back to the Creole city she had thought George might show a certain amount of pride in her writing. Instead, he carped at her "great achievements" and "brilliant feats." Yet his emotional state was not as bad as it had been in the earlier years, and for that, at least, she could be grateful.

Her columns in this period dealt with subjects that perhaps reflected her own changing moods. A trenchant one began: "Do men really prefer female inbeciles to intelligent women? Is a woman never so attractive as when she is acting like a three-ply idiot? The consensus of opinion among women is that to find favor with men they must appear to be fools. There is no aspersion upon her character that the average woman resents so bitterly as being called strong-minded."

Then she described how an intelligent woman seemed to feel she must act like a fool at the approach of a man, and "bridled and smirked and giggled and rolled her eyes." Onlookers would have been inclined to suggest a home for the feeble-minded, except that they understood she was merely trying to snag a mate. Out of earshot of men, the same woman always talked with considerable sense.

A group of columns—entitled "Jollies That We Know"—dealt with the power of flattery. One pictures a woman's visit to a milliner to purchase a simple close-fitting hat. But when she allows "a purple structure, three feet by four, composed of a dead fowl and a peck of violets" to be pinned on, and the milliner "falls back in an attitude of rapture and murmurs in ecstasy, 'A dream! A picture! Perfection!,'" all is over. "And after she gets home she sits down and wonders how it was that she bought a high-priced picture hat that she didn't need in place of the inexpensive little hat she did need and that she started out to purchase. . . . But the milliner knows."

In another, she revealed how a clever wife approached the question of a new dress. "To flaunt an imported dress suddenly before an unprepared man is like waving a red flag at a mad bull, but there are ways of leading him gently up to it without having him tear up the earth. 'My dear,' says the jollier, 'I hate to bother a man who has such important things on his mind as you have, about such a little matter as a dress, but your taste is so absolutely faultless, and I've come to rely so entirely on your artistic feeling about things, that I can't make up my mind to buy a frock without your seeing it. Couldn't you stop by Madame Hole-em-up's this morning and see the gown I was looking at yesterday.' He can. He stops and Madame does the rest. A man has to live up to his wife's belief in his taste, if he goes broke in the effort."

Men jolliers were satirized also. In courting, the man realizes "that the path to the altar must be strewn with compliments. 'How beautiful you are!' he cries to even the homeliest Maria, and when Maria—who knows better—faintly demurs, he adds, 'in my eyes,' and Maria thanks Heaven for having created one man with taste and discrimination."

In a serious vein she told how she had made friends with an amiable old woman who apparently "had everything." While chatting with her, Dorothy noticed two jarring notes in the dowager's conversation. Despite her hundreds of thousands of dollars, she dreaded poverty. "I may still end up in the poorhouse," she would

say fearfully. At first Dorothy thought she was joking; she quickly learned that this was no subject for laughter.

The dowager went about accompanied by a male servant to guard her against stray dogs. Even when she made the short trip from her limousine across Royal Street to a store, her attendant must watch for the beasts. Why? She feared hydrophobia, the terrible death which she had read about in the papers.

When this friend died, Dorothy learned that her executors found bureau drawers crammed with newspaper clippings and magazine articles on two subjects—mistreatment of the aged in almshouses, and attacks by mad dogs. Thereafter, in her columns and in conversation, Dorothy Dix cited this instance as a fine example of "borrowed trouble." Perhaps she herself would die indigent or from an attack of rabies, but she did not intend to anticipate the day!

On the other hand, Dorothy was never extravagant. When she began to furnish her new quarters in a way that she had often wished, she hit upon a method that appealed to her sentiment and also to her sense of economy. "I knew I couldn't order beds, chairs, tables, and so on, en masse, like the well-to-do. I had to get them one by one."

Each object was purchased with the money she earned by writing a special article or story at nights or on holidays. She fastened the printed story itself on the bottom of a chair, the back of a sofa, or whatever she acquired in this way. Thus, the acquisition meant not simply a chair, but a poem over which she had worked for weeks; not only a sofa, but a story about her childhood in Tennessee.

She could point to a bed and say: "That represents three episodes syndicated to fill the patent-made insides of many a country newspaper. If you turned up the mattress, you'd find an account of a fireman who saved a family, then went back after the cat—all so that I could have something nice to rest on."

Soon she elaborated this technique. Into her story she introduced a description of the object she wanted to buy with it. Her heroine reclined on "an upholstered divan, with a pattern of flowers that she had always admired." Dorothy had admired it, too, and now she could purchase it! She discovered some disadvantage, however, in telling friends of this device. Too many of them "peered behind bureaus and under tables and turned up the cushions and corners, all of which every good housekeeper knows should be sternly discouraged." (Years later, after disposing of various pieces, she received a puzzled note from Florida: the correspondent had bought a chair, and on the bottom of it had found one of her stories. He wondered if it were a form of criticism?)

Although she poked fun at herself about it, she persistently yearned for a secure home such as she had known in earlier years. Generally she liked the type of solid furnishings used at Woodstock in her youth. But, as she had indicated in an earlier article on dust-catching furbelows, flimsy easels, and whatnots, she preferred uncluttered rooms. "I like it hygienic," she said. . . . And even now, when she could perhaps have afforded some servants, she did her own housework.

During this period of domesticity, her name remained before her readers, although it appeared somewhat less often than before. When covering trials during the next few years she demonstrated the same technical skill but, for some reason, her accounts of them made less of an impression than might have been expected.

Some of the cases fascinated her because they had the dramatic qualities of classical fiction. As a girl at Woodstock, she had first read the Guy de Maupassant tale of the government clerk who found his wife wearing magnificent jewels. She told him they were mere imitations; after her death when he took them to a jeweler, hoping to receive a few francs for the paste things, he discovered them worth a fortune—the gift of her lover.

In New York, Dorothy Dix discovered a counterpart of the story. An obscure man found his wife putting on a necklace of superb pearls. Hastily she explained: "Isn't it wonderful what imitations people make these days? I got them for \$25." He nodded: "They look marvelous." A week or so afterward the husband returned home unexpectedly and found a Tiffany agent restringing the jewels. "I congratulate you, sir, on getting such a set of matched pearls. Dirt cheap at \$40,000." When the caller left, the husband caught his wife's arm and forced her to tell him the other man's

name. The husband rushed out and shot him; then came back to shoot her.

Dorothy Dix witnessed, too, the pathos and frustration of a minor bank official who worked in the midst of vast riches. He and his small staff managed a safety deposit vault. For years the wife of a railroad executive had put her jewels there during the summer. And now she appeared with a new acquisition—a diamond and ruby pendant valued at \$60,000. The manager of the vault accompanied her and waited while she deposited the jewelry. In a hurry, she did not notice that he neglected to snap the lock of the box. For years he had wondered if he could manage such a feat; now he had accomplished it. Working against time, he tried to dispose of the jewel, but the ruby was much too well known. All of the buyers, including those most accustomed to dealing in such goods, hesitated, and the police stepped in and arrested him.

Intrigued by the incident, Dorothy Dix wrote about the troubles of an amateur thief. She went to the detective in charge because she wanted to know how he had received the piece so easily. He said it was simple. "There were only three places in the whole city where anybody would even consider taking such a chance. The second one had it. The proprietor had been stalling off the fellow while he tried to decide what to do."

Stories about jewels were intriguing to Dorothy Dix. Gems had always interested her; in time she would own a valuable set of her own, "my old woman's folly." . . . Meanwhile, another story, another commuter's trip to New York and back. Then, in the spring of 1905, arrived a summons to a murder trial which was one of the most sensational in that whole period.

Nan Patterson—one of the original glittering Florodora girls—was charged with killing her well-to-do bookie lover, Caesar Young. The story was both glamorous and sordid. For a while, New York said, Nan could have had her pick of men and fortunes. She had fallen in love with one less spectacularly rich than might have been expected, then refused to give him back to his wife.

Nan, as Dorothy Dix viewed her, was a girl almost preordained to go the wrong way, and she fulfilled her destiny. Caesar Young tried several times to say good-by; each time her appeal proved greater than his will power. Then he arranged to go on a trans-Atlantic trip with his wife and tried to make a final break with Nan. She cried, pleaded, asked him to meet her once again. (Meanwhile her sister-in-law bought a revolver.) And one tranquil June morning of 1904, Nan—gun in her pocket—went riding with Caesar in a hansom cab.

Several hours later, strangers found Caesar lying across Nan's lap, shot to death. She had grains of burnt gunpowder on her right glove; but after a representative of her lawyers left the police precinct, her glove disappeared. And just what happened in the cab, no one could ever be sure. Nan did not tell, at least not clearly.

Variously her lawyers suggested that poor Caesar—crazed with passion—must have shot himself; or, she and Caesar had struggled over the gun, and he had accidentally killed himself. Then the state demonstrated, by using a human skeleton, a gun, and diagrams, that this was impossible. Nan had an answer for that. She really didn't know what happened; she must have been looking out of the window and missed it!

She had been on trial before, and the jury had split. Now, the country watched to see if Nan would be acquitted. The newspaper illustrations of the time do not support the claim that Nan was a beauty, but her sultry eyes and pouting lips must have provided her with a large share of allure. For her it had paid well. Dorothy analyzed her: "A little, dull, weak creature without even the initiative to sin herself—a mere straw on the stream of circumstance." She considered Nan a woman without pride, hate, or resentment— "the kitteny kind who want only to live in the sun on a silk cushion and lap cream."

Nan, slightly plump in her dark shirred silk, wore her hair in a heavy pompadour, a reminder of her chorus days. She listened casually as witnesses filled in details of her earlier years. At a time when most girls talked of their first formal dances, Nan had become a public character—the woman kept by a well-known sporting man. At the trial Dorothy Dix thought she seemed less a murderer than a simple grafter, a girl who had wanted furs and smart dresses, wine and jewels.

As the district attorney piled up the evidence against her, Nan

Patterson was suddenly overcome by terror. She was beyond tears. After an intermission attendants almost had to carry her back to the courtroom. For the first time she used rouge in defiance of her pallor, making it even worse with the "red spot that never came or went or wavered burned upon her cheek." The jury at last returned. As in the other case, no agreement had been reached, and Nan would go free.

From the bench the judge gave Nan Patterson a lecture: he had followed the evidence on her past life with a certain astonishment and horror. Twice she had narrowly missed execution. Now the future lay before her; if she were wise, she would profit by what had happened to her and turn to a new career.

The next night, as Dorothy Dix tells us, "Nan Patterson was hitting it up in the 'district.'" Could the readers guess how hard it was for someone with a "past" to make a living? Many people had expressed sympathy with Nan during the trial; but was anything so unrelenting as the way society banded together to push back a woman who tried to get out of the gutter?

"Not many of the good men and women who pitied the girl and have been most anxious to see her acquitted will hold out a hand to her," said Dorothy Dix. Yet when Dorothy had talked to her in her cell, Nan had already received tempting offers from theatrical managers who wanted the services of a "singing murderess." They were ready and able to show her how to profit by her past in a way that the judge had hardly intended.

This was a case history with an ending that surprised Dorothy Dix. Years later, newspapers found Nan Patterson living quietly as the wife of a successful businessman in another part of the country. Unlike Florence Burns and many of the others, she had lived down her bad days. . . . Often, when men and women wrote Dorothy Dix about similar situations, she reflected on the transformation of Nan Patterson, and told them that sometimes a new beginning could be achieved.

The following year brought a case in which the verdict was changed by the story Dorothy Dix wrote. A seventeen-year-old girl from New York's "Little Italy" was accused of slashing to death

her uncle and aunt in a fit of insane rage. Dorothy planned a routine visit to the cell in the Tombs.

Josephine Terranova had refused to talk to anyone. Now the gentle manner of her visitor gave the girl confidence, and she told a tale of terror and violence. She had been brought from the old country by an aunt and uncle who made her a virtual slave. They kept Josephine from the world, they beat her, and then the uncle seduced her.

In time, temporarily escaping the watchful eyes of her relatives, Josephine met Gaetano Reggio. Sullenly the uncle permitted their marriage and, holding Gaetano's hand, Josephine went about New York for the first time, discovering what a "beautiful and wonderful place" it was. Then Gaetano learned what had happened with her uncle and deserted her. With that, Josephine donned the same red velvet dress that Gaetano had bought for the wedding ceremony, and went to settle the score with her aunt and uncle.

As she looked at the girl's heavily muscled arms, Dorothy remembered what the coroner said. It had taken almost superhuman strength to deliver those blows; ironically, Josephine had acquired that strength slaving for her relatives.

As she talked to Dorothy of her surroundings, Josephine Terranova called the gaunt Tombs "a mansion." Dorothy understood that to this girl the prison was more a home than anything she had known in America. Elizabeth Gilmer remembered her early reading at Woodstock and realized that there was a strong parallel between Josephine and Hardy's tragic Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Each had been betrayed, then each had avenged herself in the hope that she might show her husband she was "not what he thought I was."

Back at the Journal, Dorothy wrote steadily for hours. As page after page went to the city desk, the editor became more and more excited. Into her report Dorothy had poured all of her convictions about injustice and the mistreatment of simple human beings. As the last sheet reached his desk, the editor told later how he put down his pencil with a word of finality: "This settles it. She's already freed that girl."

The judge and jury agreed with the city editor; Josephine went free.

Gunfire on Madison Square Roof

n the early fall of 1905 Dorothy faced another visit to New York and a period of concentrated work that would mean more to her than any comparable period in her career. It began with an unexpected salute. The New York Herald decided that Dorothy Dix's activities merited a tribute beyond any yet given them—a full page of interview, history, photographs, and drawings.

She was "feeling poorly," as the Tennessee expression had it, suffering vague pains and swellings. Part of the trouble, she told friends, was overwork—the result of constant application to her duties; another part—a certain tension that grew out of her frequent changes of residence. "But I don't want to be sick; I can't take time off for it or anything else," she said, and she did not. The Herald's interview, for instance, would be highly important for her, and she accepted it promptly.

The big spread cited only briefly her coverage of the newspaper trials. Nearly all the space concerned her columns of opinion and the letters from her readers. The account had as its theme her widening influence on American manners and attitudes.

The article observed that Miss Dix had ruled against curlpapers for young wives at breakfast as "worse than tobacco-steeped velveteen jackets" for men. Whatever the failing of husband or wife, the account predicted that she would locate it and bring it to light. More and more of America's homes were known to take her as counselor. Sometimes angry clients did rip her page to bits, but then, upon further reflection, many of them went out to buy another copy. After rereading, they concluded that Dorothy Dix was right in saying, for example, that the new golf fad was "more improving than getting fat in a cosy corner."

Perhaps it would surprise many, said the interviewer, to know that she had turned out at their meeting to be far from an aggressive type. "She does not belong to a cult of advisers to femininity who never took any of their own counsel. . . . Self-assertion is impossible to a woman whose favorite relaxation is washing dishes just for the fun of it."

Her voice and manner still proclaimed her as of the South; her eyes might have been intended for dreaminess, "but, as she never got into the habit of musing, they fail to mask the flashes which come from an active brain." He thought any indolent tendency in Miss Dix was contradicted by a French vivacity, a speech quickened "in a vain endeavor to keep pace with the rapid play of her ideas."

Telling of her divided life, the writer described how she presided over a home in New Orleans, with a "devoted husband who does not read anything she writes, for he has too many business projects on hand. They make it a rule never to talk shop to each other, and the arrangement is an eminently satisfactory one."

It was of her advice to readers that the Dorothy Dix of 1906 wanted most to speak. She thought her mission, if she had one, was to write for women. "If I have ever been able to influence the men to any extent, it has been a reflex influence exerted through their wives and daughters." Then she said something that may have made many fellow Southerners wonder. Looking for a line to guide her, she found it in the words used about Abraham Lincoln: "When he spoke the common people heard themselves think out loud."

Why did she think her advice had gone so well? Perhaps because she tried to make women "see things as they are." Let them suffer and be strong in sorrow if they had to, she said; yet she thought it better for them not to start suffering until they had done all they could to remedy conditions. Then, in most cases, they would realize they had settled the matter without the need for any agony at all. Also, as she often did herself, she urged people not to fear vague shadows; and she told of that rich old woman who trembled at the thought of twin hazards—poverty and hydrophobia.

One morning Dorothy had a brisk note from Mr. Brisbane. Her column of advice and opinion was going so well that he felt sure the public would welcome a heavier schedule. Beginning very soon, the paper would like not three, but five columns a week. To friends Dorothy admitted a slight dismay over this new load of daily work, almost double that to which she had accustomed herself.

Brisbane and Hearst anticipated her reaction; as usual they stood ready to pay for what they got. Her salary would not be quite doubled, but it would go up several thousand dollars a year. Dorothy lost no time in agreeing. Not only was the money welcome, but also the change would obviously increase her prestige and readership. "When I thought how many more people I could reach, on the lower East Side, up Broadway and beyond, of course I was glad to do it."

Brisbane himself was steadily more impressed with these columns. He discovered further and wider uses of them, not only in the Journal and other papers in the Hearst syndicate, but in the Cosmopolitan magazine and related Hearst enterprises. Even after several years, she would glow with pleasure, remembering one of his citations. Until her death, though she tossed away many letters of praise, she kept a hastily typed note from Brisbane, signed in pencil:

Dear Mrs. Gilmer:

Your article about the Ordinary Woman is really very fine. You can do great good and achieve great success in that line. It is the kind of article that I have been trying to get for a long time. It takes brains and heart—a rare combination—to write it.

In his dealings with her, her "discoverer," Rudolph Block, had stressed Dorothy Dix's humor; Brisbane favored greater sympathy. Miss Dix nodded in agreement to both; by now she felt sure enough of herself to do her work in her own way.

Soon afterward Dorothy was asked to cover a new crime case, in which she came to side strongly with a man charged with murder. At Toms River, New Jersey, Dr. Frank Brouwer went on trial for the poisoning of his sickly wife. Though continuing to live together, they had not been happy for some time, and neighbors heard their bickering. The wife had taxed the genial doctor with extravagances and also accused him of attentions to other women. During her illness she told a sister that she feared Dr. Brouwer was feeding her the wrong medicines, and the nurses whispered that he was trying to kill her. The wife died screaming with pain.

After Mrs. Brouwer's death, the body was exhumed and arsenic and ground glass were found in the stomach. Still, as in the "baby-beating" case in the same state, the defense blamed the undertakers, insisting that the foreign materials had been introduced by "embalmers' tubes," uncleaned after previous use. (Careless morticians seemed to thrive in New Jersey.)

Whatever her first opinion of the crime, Dorothy Dix listened to testimony, asked questions, spoke with the doctor, and then decided that Dr. Brouwer was a victim of family hate, of gossip compounded on gossip, "suspicions in which the deadliest things one can believe of another human being are believed and covertly insinuated, though incapable of proof."

Dorothy pictured one of the main witnesses against the doctor, the dead wife's sister, as a "tall, slender, dark woman, who needs only happiness to make her beautiful." The defendant explained her antagonism by saying, "After my wife died she thought she would run my house and business and children. When she found she couldn't, she turned against me."

The doctor impressed Dorothy as "a big, rugged man, rough-chiseled . . . an enormous pair of shoulders, arms and neck, a big head, big strong, soft hands, essentially the physician's hands . . . a handsome man in a dominant-man fashion." He referred to his wife, quietly, as Carrie; and to her family, equally quietly, only as

"they," his enemy. He had been a carpenter, then had managed to send himself through medical school, and had begun to succeed when he first met Carrie. Their personal troubles? He had his own explanation: false rumors and the hostility of his wife's people.

Dorothy considered Dr. Brouwer his own best witness. He evaded no questions and gave common-sense explanations of occurrences previously made to appear sinister. Dorothy sat beside the accused man during the terrible hours when the jury argued over the charges. (She frequently took a place beside the woman or man on trial, at their request. A case seldom ended without the accused speaking to her in friendship.) Dr. Brouwer told her how his two boys were waiting at home, not sure when he would return. Months before, on his arrest, they had been told that he was called to another town on medical work. The doctor described the way he had always slept beside the younger son. In the cell hardly a night passed that he did not reach out, half-asleep, to see if the blanket covered the child. "My arms have asked for him, Miss Dix. . . ."

Finally the jury filed in, to announce its verdict—not guilty. The crowd shouted. Dr. Brouwer shook Miss Dix's hand, and people came forward to congratulate him. The doctor had a few words for the jurors: he hoped that none of them would ever have to go through what he had just suffered and be accused of a crime of which he was innocent. Onlookers cried as he turned and quickly left the room.

When he approached his house Dorothy Dix was waiting outside, and she pictured the scene as the two boys ran across the porch to greet their father. The doctor caught them to him and went inside to meet his own mother. Dorothy recorded as a last detail that the doctor's mother had repolished his name plate and nailed it up again.

Back in New York, Dorothy had to push everything else aside to catch up with her columns and her answers to insistent personal letters from readers. But within a week, as she worked through the day's mail, Dorothy found that she was continually in pain, the worst she had ever known. She hastily called a doctor, who gave her a thorough examination.

"You've had these pains for some time, haven't you?"

Off and on, she admitted, but she hadn't let them concern her. He became grave. This time Miss Dix had to be concerned, about herself; he was afraid she must have an operation, and a serious one. His face showed his conviction, and he shook his head to all her pleas for a delay of several months. Anxiously she prepared to follow his advice. Calling the office, she arranged to remain at home, doing her columns and answering her letters there until the time arrived for her to go to the hospital.

She was under great tension, and, as she said later, she began to understand for the first time just how much these letters from her readers meant to her. She caught herself thinking, not of the spectacular trials and disasters that splashed her name across the front pages, but of the notes from the women and girls and aging men. "It was only then that I realized how much I'd come to think about those people."

Lying in bed at home, she worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day to finish the letters on hand and get on to the new batch which arrived each morning. She wired New Orleans: could George come up to New York? At least he would be at her side. . . . A letter to a friend, the wife of her old associate, John Kendall of the Picayune, gives a picture of her condition and the way she maintained her humor in spite of it:

I have so many complications, from dropsical swellings up and down, that I remind myself of Jerome K. Jerome's hero, who had everything but housemaid's knee. However, I have come at last to the end, as my New York doctor has decided that, in view of the fact that the pain does not abate, he will operate on next Wednesday. Mr. Gilmer is coming on to New York and he will wire my brother . . . so that if you call Ed you can hear how it goes with me every day.

I believe there will be only four days of active danger. I don't feel the least afraid or nervous. I believe I will get through safely, and if I don't, I would far rather be dead than go through what I

have since July. It takes a lot more courage to face life than it does to face death, don't you think?

And then—forgetting her own troubles—she wrote of Mrs. Kendall's recent loss in childbirth:

From my heart I sympathize with you in your disappointment. It must have seemed cruelly hard to go through all the long agony of sickness and suffering and then be left with empty arms. I know I can say no word of comfort that your own beautiful faith has not whispered, but from my soul I do believe that all things are ordered for the best for us, and I have no doubt that in a few years from now, when you are strong and well, and lusty and vigorous children are playing about your knee, you will see how perhaps it saved you from a greater sorrow. But this little dream-child faded away before the very fibers of your heart knit around it . . .

Thus, on the verge of an operation that might have been fatal, Dorothy Dix gave part of her time to the reassuring of others. Until almost the hour she went to the hospital she continued with the letters from her readers; and as soon as she could sit up she resumed her work. Recovery was slow. For more than two months she had to remain hospitalized, with her husband at her bedside.

When her first weekly pay check arrived at the hospital, she sent it back; she had not earned it, she said. A messenger returned with a note: Mr. Hearst could not take money from a sick woman. The checks arrived regularly thereafter, and Dorothy Dix said later that whenever she felt momentary fury at some order from the paper, she remembered this kindness. . . . As soon as she was better again, she returned to her office, and the first task she gave herself was catching up with every letter that had come to her. There would be no more murder tales until she had done her duty to the readers of her column.

Before another year passed, she had to give months of her time to a murder story that was to become the classic triangle case of the period before World War I. More important, in the Journal's opinion, than Dorothy's columns and letters was the sensational crime involving Stanford White, Harry K. Thaw, and Evelyn Nesbit, at one time Thaw's mistress, at another, his wife.

The case lacked nothing: a girl that artists termed the most beautiful in the world; the greatest, or worst, spendthrift of his era, and the most brilliant architect in America. It had glitter and corruption, a meeting of Broadway, Park Avenue, and the underworld, a mixture of tinsel and degradation. All this and young Jack Barrymore, too, who knew a good thing when he saw it—in this case, Evelyn Nesbit, "the mud-splattered lily."

On a June night, as the chorus of Mamzelle Champagne shrilled inside Madison Square Roof Garden, Harry Thaw, the playboy, fired three bullets into the chest and face of Stanford White, the architect, and then gave himself up. "He ruined my wife," said Thaw. "I did it for the purity of the American home." (Some people considered the last statement to be perhaps the most fantastic utterance of the new century.)

After that, as Dorothy Dix observed, the shooting became the country's major interest. New York businessmen put up signs: "All discussion of the Thaw case barred during business hours." Village store loungers argued it; women's clubs deplored it; ministers thundered about Sodom and Gomorrha; and European philosophers thought nothing so strange had ever come out of strange America.

The country quickly learned the main facts. In her teens Evelyn had been taken to New York by her mother, where she had attracted the attention of artists, theatrical men, and millionaires. Charles Dana Gibson, then James Montgomery Flagg, reproduced something of her magnificence of face and form; the architect White—another kind of artist who appreciated many forms of loveliness—drew her into his brilliant circle in which the arts and the theater merged.

As a Florodora girl, Evelyn then met Harry Thaw. When he first saw her he wrapped fifty-dollar bills around the stems of American Beauty roses and tossed them to her. The rest of the story is one of Evelyn's changeable affections as she shifted alternately from Thaw to White, and from White to Thaw. For a time she and Thaw moved together about the cafés, and the older Stanford

White slipped into the background. Evelyn and her mother went to Europe, and Harry followed. The couple quarreled; Evelyn returned to America and once again seemed to favor the architect. Then a year later, to the amusement of Broadway, Thaw married the girl. This was on Christmas day in 1905.

Thaw, whom somebody once described as "an elderly boy," took Evelyn to Pittsburgh, where she entered a much stricter and quieter life with Thaw's Presbyterian mother, and his sister who had married the Earl of Yarmouth. Then all at once, in the summer of 1906, Thaw sought out his one-time friend White and shot him to death. The reason? Evelyn had been telling him the "terrible thing" that White had done to her long before her marriage.

Already, as Dorothy Dix observed, Stanford White's name had appeared in print with lurid accounts of a stag dinner attended by some of America's elite—the pièce de résistance, a massive pie from which rose, not blackbirds, but a nude girl. And now others charged that White had made a profession not only of architecture but also of very young ladies, and told stories of richly hung studios, the scenes of "orgies that surpassed those of ancient Rome," with plush swings in which the girls were "spun into unconsciousness."

Into the court walked an Evelyn Thaw who made onlookers blink. She was dressed almost like a child. Her figure was covered, Dorothy Dix pointed out, by a dress that might have been a schoolgirl's uniform—plain blue with a Buster Brown kind of white collar; on her head sat an adolescent's scoop hat. In this guise Evelyn told how she had first gone with another girl, hesitatingly, to Mr. White's 24th Street studio for luncheon. Weeks later he paid her mother's expenses for a trip back home and invited Evelyn to supper.

Others were to be there, White had promised, but no one appeared. Afterward he took her on a tour of the sumptuous establishment. They entered a small room and found glasses and a bottle of champagne. When she drank it, she found it was "bitter and funny-tasting"; she heard a pounding in her ears, the room went black, and she woke up in a bed with mirrors all around. Mr. White was beside her, and she "screamed and screamed." Retelling her story in court, Evelyn trembled and broke out in tears.

This kind of thing had never happened to Evelyn before, she said, and her attorney, rolling his eyes to the ceiling, groaned in sympathy. White "had perpetrated the foulest, the most cowardly, the most dishonorable of the sins and crimes that can stain or deface the image of God. He—the strong, the powerful—had lured a poor little girl to her undoing, and to gratify a moment of passion and lust, had crushed the poor little flower that was struggling toward light and toward Heaven." And poor little Evelyn cried harder than ever.

Appraising the Thaw affair, Dorothy Dix called it "pure melodrama in real life." No master of stagecraft could have added more exciting details: beautiful heroine, wronged in early youth; "elderly, aristocratic, accomplished and suave villain"; a wealthy young hero, ready to overlook the girl's past and protect her with his name and position; the white-haired mother who took the heroine to her bosom for the boy's sake. David Belasco himself could not have imagined a more resounding climax than Thaw's killing of White in the very building—Madison Square Garden—that was "the flower of the great architect's genius, and in the midst of a musical comedy."

The jury split, and a second trial began. But now, Dorothy noted, facts slipped out to cast doubt on the picture of damaged innocence built up by the Thaw partisans. Into the picture came a Boston millionaire and a New York theatrical man; Stanford White could not exactly have ruined Evelyn, because these men had known her first. And the aspiring young John Barrymore, it turned out, had also hovered around her for months, so closely that Broadway had thought them married. John, summoned to the court, sat there gnawing his lips as Evelyn testified that her practical mother had scornfully rejected the "young pup." Obviously Mama favored bigger dogs.

Repeatedly now District Attorney William Travers Jerome subjected Evelyn to cross-questioning; some thought it the most brutal they had ever witnessed. But the lovely Mrs. Thaw replied carefully, and always in the interest of Harry Thaw. At one point Jerome sank into a chair beside Dorothy Dix: "I know she's lying, and she knows I know it, but I can't break her story. Why?"

Dorothy Dix understood. "She's been trained to meet a better questioner than you, Mr. Jerome. A jealous husband. Don't forget that night after night she was waked up and shaken by the shoulders and put through a quizzing that even you couldn't manage." Wearily Jerome agreed. . . . By now Miss Dix had offered the nation some revealing portraits of the principals of the case. To her, Evelyn Thaw's face had loveliness of two kinds, "la beauté du diable" and that of an angel.

Full face, with pouting lips, Evelyn had the look of a siren, while in profile she appeared a wistful child. Eyes, long and almond-shaped, stared out from under penciled brows; the slight tip at the end of the nose gave an added piquancy. At twenty-four she did not seem more than seventeen, despite illness and experiences that might shrivel a woman's youth "as a sirocco does a flower." Dorothy Dix summed her up: "a mystery, half woman and half child, and wholly sphinx."

At first some people regarded Evelyn only as a brainless doll, but as her trial progressed she revealed a resourceful mind. Dorothy thought her the most debonair little adventuress since Becky Sharp, a girl soldier of fortune wanting, above all, gaiety and excitement. Her mother had been a handsome girl, her father an easygoing lawyer who let funds slip through his fingers. Until his death the family lived in modest comfort; Evelyn went briefly to school and dancing school, where boys fought to get her as a partner.

When Evelyn was ten, Mrs. Nesbit had to support her son and daughter. First she ran a boardinghouse, then a dressmaker's shop in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, but both ventures failed. At one point the family's resources were so low that the mother cut up bed sheets for underclothing and bedspreads for Evelyn's dresses. In New York the girl's modeling proved poor pay for a time, and the Nesbits lived in one room. Then a newspaper ran Evelyn's picture; she found a chorus job, and wealthy men began to pursue her.

A girl who had once lacked carfare now had limousines at her disposal, a yacht awaiting her in the harbor, wines, evening costumes . . . It was well enough, Dorothy Dix commented, for moralists to say that Evelyn should have turned away from such

things, but she was seventeen, she had no restraining influences of heredity or character, and the mother certainly didn't hold her back. Along came Stanford White—"connoisseur in women no less than in porcelain and jewels."

White envisioned Evelyn as a Galatea, himself as a Pygmalion; he sent her to school, gave her grace and style. "He taught her, as only so consummate an artist could, how to be beautiful, how to dress, how to make the most of herself by emphasizing her littleness . . . her childishness of appearance." Dorothy Dix showed a woman's fascination for a five-hundred-dollar book of photographs that White had made of Evelyn, in kimonos with pomegranate blooms in her hair, as a sprite, but "never as a dressed-up young woman in silks and satins."

Dorothy concluded that Evelyn Nesbit's most remarkable characteristic was her pliability. "She is the human chameleon, able to take on any color of those she is with." Her life was a series of adaptations, each perfect for its hour. Studying hard with White's help, she proved a "sponge for absorbing culture and refinement." At the trial she used language that was precise, the speech of the drawing room rather than the greenroom.

But Evelyn used a different vocabulary in letters to a girl friend, "reeking of the slang of the underworld and gloating over orgies at the Dead Rat Café in Paris." As for the two men . . . Dorothy Dix pointed out that Stanford White was thoroughly married, and showed no inclination of changing his status. When the bachelor Thaw appeared, Evelyn Nesbit welcomed him because she liked variety, the opportunity to travel, and, above all, a possible marriage to someone of position. She had always hoped to go back in glory to the Pittsburgh that had snubbed her and her mother.

As to that story of White's "betrayal," Dorothy Dix thought Evelyn initially had needed a way to explain her somewhat questionable past to her new suitor, and had grasped at this straw. Apparently during their stay in Europe, Harry had refused to accept this explanation. In any case they had parted. But Dorothy reminded her readers that meanwhile they had enjoyed a "premature honeymoon" in Europe, and that the girl who played "baby lily"

in court had swept across Europe in Monsieur Worth's most sophisticated silks. Rumors had come back of certain brutal beatings given Evelyn by the sullen Thaw, and of his escapades on the Continent.

Home in America, Evelyn made another of her changes. Stanford White stood ready to court her, and she won his favor again by telling him of Thaw's mistreatments. Then, surprising her and everybody else, Thaw decided he could no longer live without Evelyn, and he married her. Dorothy Dix thought the girl made her last and greatest shift when she went to live with Thaw's strait-laced mother in her gloomy house in Pittsburgh.

Mrs. Thaw supported missions and filled her house with clergymen; the environment that she offered her new daughter-in-law could not have been stranger had it been the North Pole. Nevertheless Evelyn slipped into her niche "with a sort of demure piquancy." Still, the one-time Princess of Bohemia must have been badly bored. The company of just one man . . . for Evelyn it must have been a bleak outlook. Thus it was, Dorothy Dix reasoned, that the girl had begun to stir up Thaw's jealousy, repeating her diatribes against Stanford White as a kind of amusement in a dull situation.

Other wives did the same thing, with only a "thrilling family spat" as the result. But weak, brooding Thaw needed only a fixed idea to drive him to crime, and his wife had provided it.

Appraising Harry Thaw, Dorothy considered his face more shallow than bad, with unusually high cheekbones and small shifty eyes. Thaw's eyebrows were sparse, and his hair was of the fine and clinging sort sometimes called "lanky." The lips were weak, the chin cleft. Without the tired, lined eyes, the face might have been that of a boy of thirteen.

This man had bought his way through life, though not always easily. He had been "permitted" to leave Harvard at twenty-one; going on to Princeton, he found after three years that that institution had had too much of him. From then on he had accepted the world as a field in which to sow his wild oats. Realizing the boy's weaknesses, Dorothy Dix noted, the father left him a scant \$2,400-a-

year allowance; but the mother made certain that Harry would come to no good when she granted him an additional \$80,000, and then other big sums on demand.

Even before he met Evelyn Nesbit, Harry had been getting into the papers. In Paris he gave a \$50,000 dinner for a hundred beautiful actresses, with bracelets and brooches for each. For the brother of Japan's Mikado he held a three-day party costing somewhat more. Then a countess told the world that because her friend Harry would not marry her she was building a submarine in which to spend the rest of her days.

As the case progressed, many of these facts were used to throw up doubts of Harry Thaw's sanity. One aged attorney made legal history by proclaiming Thaw guilty of "dementia Americana!" In and out of court went Dorothy, missing few details, turning out daily stories as sharp as they were complete. Arthur Brisbane, in his element over this sensational story, sat beside her constantly when she returned to the *Journal* office.

As the trial went on, Dorothy Dix thought more and more about the wretched Thaw—victim of his money and of his own weakness. She found him not unintelligent. Had Thaw been poor and forced to find his own way, Dorothy thought he might have done well. "It makes all the difference whether a man inherits his money or makes it himself. . . . There is no moral restraint like not having the price, especially when you are young; and many a youth is sober and respectable by the necessity of keeping a clear head in order to keep his job. The plain truth is that not many of us are industrious enough to work unless we have to or need the money."

As Dorothy Dix had anticipated, the jury finally brought in a verdict of insanity and Harry Thaw was sent to a mental institution. Harry's mother and sister turned their backs on Evelyn, and she left the courtroom alone. For years after that Dorothy followed a tangled sequence of episodes involving Evelyn and Harry Thaw.

Harry escaped from his asylum, was rearrested, judged sane, and released. A few years later he was charged with kidnaping and misusing a nineteen-year-old boy. Discovered with his wrists slashed, Thaw was again declared insane, then once more released. In his fifties he showed up on Broadway—a white-haired, good-time

Charlie—to be sued by movie actresses in breach-of-contract cases, and by blondes for paddlings with hairbrushes, whippings, and other mistreatment. His family spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep Harry Thaw out of prison.

Meanwhile Evelyn had a child, the result of a meeting with Thaw while he was in the first asylum, she said. He claimed the father must be somebody else. She went back on the stage, and drew audiences for a time. After divorcing Harry, she married her dancing partner, ran a night club, became a dope addict, went into bankruptcy. Evelyn was sued for divorce by the dancing partner, who named another man; she sued the partner, naming two women.

Yet at least once—like that other Florodora girl, Nan Patterson—Evelyn Nesbit made a courageous effort to come back. For the child's sake, she explained, she managed with great effort to cure herself of the morphine habit. For a time she ran a teashop, until her troubles once more overwhelmed her, gambling arrests, fines for contempt of court, ejection from hotels, and troubles over men; and like Harry, she once tried to kill herself. To Evelyn, as Dorothy Dix said, there came almost every degradation, just as she had once known almost every success.

At intervals Dorothy wrote and spoke of the tragedy of Evelyn Nesbit. Dorothy met many such women, and thousands of them wrote to her through the years. To them she offered vigorous advice in words that stung; yet often she showed a generous compassion.

A New York friend, hearing of a letter she had sent to one of these women from the fringes of Broadway, protested: "Dorothy, you think of these people as if they were nice." Dorothy Dix looked thoughtful: "Some of them once were, and they may be again, someday. They're not so different from either of us as you think."

The friend confessed later: "I was profoundly shocked. In 1909 or 1910 you didn't say such things, even if you believed them. But Dorothy had always been honest. As the years pass, I find myself agreeing more and more with what she told me—twenty years ago."

Dorothy Dix handled the Thaw case so well, made so many thousands of readers talk of what she wrote, that the Journal man-

agement changed its plans for her. It wanted her permanently in New York, and it wanted her badly. It held out a new proposal, under which she could begin at \$13,000 a year—the highest amount yet paid to any woman in America. Her columns of advice, her answers to letters? They would go right on, of course, plus the news stories. Miss Dix asked time to consider.

Higher up in the World

t took me a dozen years to realize the enormous responsibility people thrust upon me."

A place of eminence in the newspaper world such as no other woman in America had held was a hard offer to reject. Everything else that Dorothy Dix had done seemed a preparation for it. Already she knew the sensation, disconcerting at first, of having people whisper behind her at the criminal trials or the theater: "That's Dorothy Dix." "Miss Dix, the writer, you know."

She could discount the experience, passing it off with a chuckle: "Such things don't inflate me too much. Because a moment later the other person generally answers: "That little one? I don't believe it.'" Or, more disconcertingly, "'I can see why she never joined the Florodora girls!"

But now, as Dorothy debated the new proposal, it was no time for jokes. She understood the demands that would follow; to be ready always for assignments meant simply that she would always be called. She realized more than she had during her illness of a year or so earlier that there would never be enough time for both the daily news stories and her columns and letters. More than ever she would have to fight for the chance to do justice to those letters. For this she could prepare herself. But could she prepare herself for another clash, which might develop between her career and her husband?

A showdown over her job could no longer be avoided, and this time she went directly to George Gilmer. Talking with the ailing man in New Orleans, she argued that her brother Ed was managing the turpentine plant, taking care of business and operational details that irked George. George himself mentioned the new engine with which he wanted to experiment. Mightn't he carry on his work just as well in New York? They would find space for all the necessary equipment there.

While George remained silent, she talked on. As for his sickness, New York had specialists who dealt with rheumatic disorders; she had been inquiring about them. Up there things would be better for them both. . . . At length George Gilmer nodded. He was not enthusiastic, and from time to time he would let her know just how unenthusiastic he could be about New York. Still, he agreed to go. Though she had her misgivings, the main obstacle had been removed. She wired the Journal that she would report in two weeks.

In a long editorial the New Orleans Item expressed regret at this new move. Mrs. Gilmer's millions of readers in American cities had made her name a "household word." New Orleans would miss her not only because of her high professional standing, but also because of "the charm of the woman herself, as scores of Orleanians know it."

The Item, still rival to the Picayune which ran her contributions, added: "She has made nearly all of us laugh and many of us think; and this is a purpose as high and a calling as dignified as any need attempt."

She would be separated for a time from her beloved brother Ed, and this she regretted. Yet New York called, and she left quickly with George. At once she found quarters in a section of the city she liked—the Bretton Hall apartment building at Broadway and 86th Street. She had long admired the sweep of the Hudson along Riverside Drive. She was not quite ready to pay for that, but from

the apartment she could see the river glinting in the sun. Some day, perhaps, the Drive itself. Not for a time. . . . Big salary or not, Dorothy would watch her dollars; however, she now had a "good address."

Arthur Brisbane and one or two others had suggested to her that such a location would be good for one in her fast-improving position. And she had New York friends, she said with a wry glance, who helped her establish a reputation for greater affluence. One "lied five blocks," placing Dorothy's residence inside a more elite area!

Near the apartment George located a garage with empty space for his engines. George himself wanted a car, and Dorothy admired the big, tinny-looking machines that were sweeping along Riverside Drive at an exhilarating, though dangerous, fifteen and twenty miles an hour. They bought one and she indulged her pleasure in travel with week-end jaunts around the countryside, often with friends.

She acquired goggles, the all-enveloping tan duster, and the long veil draped over the hat and tied beneath the chin that were in vogue, and settled down for adventures along the Hudson, and sometimes all the way to Albany. After a time she learned to drive, though she often had trouble with it. Her baby hands did not quite fit the steering wheel; to push down the brake she had almost to slip off the seat. In any case, she said, she preferred to "ride and look, too."

Her delight in the automobile increased. A friend observed: "You're not hard to please, but you never really pur except when you're in a car." Dorothy agreed, and from then on her columns were filled with details about the dazzling new age of the machine.

Several New Yorkers recall Dorothy of 1908 and 1909—a woman of fifty with slightly graying hair and a figure verging on plumpness, more relaxed than she was when she first came to New York. They found her husband rather difficult, however.

"He almost never spoke, even when we got to know him better," one man remembers. "He nodded and shrugged and he seemed amiable enough. But we had the impression of a Southern gentleman, not in the best of health and in semi-retirement. Later we

learned by accident of his experiments with engines. He didn't mention his work, nor did Dorothy. As for her work, he never referred to it. We noticed that she didn't either, and she was almost uneasy when we brought up the subject before him. So we dropped it altogether."

Her mood in those days was sometimes exuberant. On an automobile trip with young newspaper friends, newly emigrated from Louisiana, they chanced upon an unoccupied house with a look of the South about it. Though it lay off the usual path, its potentialities appealed to Dorothy and she thought it exactly the place for her friends and their small boy. "I'll stake you to it," she cried impulsively, "and you can pay for it with the rent money you'd have to put out for that stuffy apartment of yours!"

The suggestion thrilled the couple, and they at once conceived an appropriate name, Dixie-on-the-Hudson, as a compliment to Dorothy. When they got home, however, they figured out the advantages that went with a steam-heated flat and reluctantly decided the project would hardly work. But they never forgot Dorothy's generous impulse.

Dorothy had heard of "Skipper" Meriwether—Walter Scott Meriwether, ship news reporter for the Herald—and wondered about that name. She inquired and learned they were kin, having a common ancestor back in Scotland. They quickly developed a friendship that lasted throughout their lives. The handsome, goodnatured "Skipper" had been born the same year as Dorothy, on his father's Mississippi plantation; he had joined the Navy, then gone into newspaper work.

Skipper's stories delighted her. He had won fame as a journalist when the battleship Maine was blown up in Havana harbor in 1898. An invincible reporter of the old school, he took and kept exclusive control of the Havana telegraph to file his messages. He made sure no one else would have the wire at crucial moments by occupying it full time himself, sending through chapter after chapter of the Bible! Later, when Peary returned from his North Pole discovery, "Skipper" Meriwether received an assignment to meet him in Labrador; he left on ten-minute notice, wearing a Palm Beach suit and straw hat.

Meriwether welcomed the "little Southern news-hen," as he called Dorothy, and introduced her to others of the craft, who promptly accepted her. In those days the New York journalistic field was a highly competitive one. In many cases reporters hardly spoke to each other, but Dorothy violated this tradition from the start. If others did not like it, they had the right to disapprove. It wouldn't bother her a particle.

So began a nine-year phase of her life. She had made up her mind, she told a few friends, that no matter how heavy her work became, she would do everything possible to make George like this city and feel he had a chance to achieve something more than had been possible in New Orleans. She would back any reasonable new invention, for she hoped above all to dispel his recurring fits of moodiness.

For some time she appeared to succeed in this plan. Acquaintances, talking among themselves after a call on the Gilmers, occasionally felt sorry for George. He was "so pleasant," a tired man and yet good-spirited—still, one rather outside his wife's circle. As one friend recalled: "We wondered sometimes if she couldn't have drawn him closer to her own interests. But that wasn't our concern, and we didn't intrude."

Then gradually these friends began to understand that Dorothy was having her troubles. By now her New York associates understood that Miss Dix had almost an abhorrence of argument. Opposed to any violence, she was slow to anger and almost never gave an outward display of temper. Though adamant in her convictions, she saw no reason for rages. When discussion approached the argumentative stage, she armored herself in silence. At other times she quietly quoted the adage that "a man convinced against his will was of the same opinion still," and said no more.

It was different in the matter of her column. There she spoke her mind without fear and with complete indifference to dissent. In connection with the letters on which she based many of her columns, she now gave a clear indication of her feeling. Spying an especially heavy delivery of mail on her desk, one of the Journal's staff had a dazzling notion. Look here—Miss Dix was getting so many of these letters and they must contain wonderful stuff, fine

circulation fodder. Why not give a prize every week, or every day, for the best one, and print it?

His notion lost its glow when presented to Miss Dix. She spoke quickly and earnestly: didn't he see that that might open the way for several kinds of abuse? It would endanger the anonymous nature of her correspondence, and kill people's confidence in her. Many people wrote because they had been assured nobody else would see their words. "I'd never agree to anything like that. It's not in my contract, you know." Her lips and her voice were firm. When Miss Dix spoke like that, the matter was dropped.

Meanwhile Arthur Brisbane himself continued his interest in her work, making suggestions for her crime stories, passing on commendations on particular columns. With the letters, Brisbane never interfered. "Even if old Double Dome had tried to see them, I don't think she'd have allowed it," says an old-timer. "He understood just how far to go in directing her."

Those letters . . . By this time she was giving at least five or six hours a day to them. Even had she not wished to devote so much of her energy to the task, it would have been necessary; she found herself steadily more absorbed in this phase of her work. "Of course," she said later, "it would have been possible to slough it off, to 'forget' a pile that arrived late in the afternoon, or ignore an especially hard note or one from a woman who appeared silly. At the office some of the men would grin and say, 'Cut your work in half, Dorothy. Just throw half of 'em on the floor.'"

She could not do it. Others might have become hardened to these appeals, but for her that was unthinkable.

As she went through the letters she sometimes sat for a half-hour at a time, thinking, mulling over the questions. "I can't do this lightly. No matter how often I handle them, there are always new troubles or new angles and approaches to old ones. And how can I be sure I'm right?" She would close her eyes or cover them with her hand, shift her position restlessly, ponder. Sometimes people who came to her apartment found her cheeks wet with tears over revelations in the notes. "Poor lost girl . . ." "This pathetic old father."

Often Dorothy Dix found the messages urgent. Some were awk-

wardly phrased, others well polished, a few very blunt, others circumspect; all shared a note of anxiety. "This means a great deal to me, Miss Dix . . ." "Before God, if I can't work this out, I'll jump off Brooklyn Bridge." From her desk she could glance at the gray bridge in the near distance; for her, she said, it became a symbol of New York's agonies. She had actually managed to prevent suicide in the case of a middle-aged woman who had written her in desperation over the loss of a husband, and later in that of an overwrought girl who thought death better than waiting for a boy in prison.

Other letters presented less sorrowful problems. A young married woman had a practical dilemma: her husband was getting a small raise, and they could use the money to move, with their two children, to a somewhat better apartment, or they could get an insurance policy with it. What did Miss Dix think? And then a young woman with her first beau wanted to be sure she did the "right things." When they returned to her house about ten at night, was it proper to ask him in; and when he took off his overcoat, should she help him? "My friend says it isn't ladylike. I think it's just good manners. This may not sound important to you, but for me . . ."

The girl and others like her need not have explained. Miss Dix understood how vital such details might be. Some almost apologized when they told of their need for funds. To such queries Dorothy Dix replied: "I know a lot about being poor. It hasn't been long since a nickel looked like a cartwheel to me." Only ten years or so before, she and Helen Pitkin had counted their dimes to see if they could afford to share an oyster loaf.

Dorothy could laugh over letters, like this one in 1908, which informed her: "I am eighteen and I want to ask you this, because you are certainly a lot older than me, and have had a whole lot more experience in everything." Going back, the girl had underlined "everything."

Already, for several Christmas seasons, Dorothy Dix had been touched by a phenomenon that would continue during most of her life. Invitations arrived from every city in which her column appeared asking her to join certain families for Christmas dinner. Few

such notes came from members of "society," she said with pride; they were from plain, homey people, who often told her that, though she would not get a fancy meal, Mother or Grandma was supposed to be an expert cook and it would be a wonderful thing for them if she would accept. They felt sure she was a widow—not many took her for an old maid!—and thought she might not have plans of her own.

Dorothy Dix valued such notes. In each case she wrote an explanation: she lived in another city and it was her misfortune that she had to miss such a grand occasion. Or: she and her husband had made other arrangements for the day but she understood that the misfortune would be hers. As one man explained: "Miss Dix could decline so nicely you felt flattered to hear her say No to you."

When Dorothy looked at people in the courts where she was reporting a case, she often found them neither fiends nor morons, but men and women like those who wrote her. They sounded in their trouble very similar to her disturbed correspondents. She told a friend: "Daily I hear from at least a dozen young women who, except for a final act of desperation, could easily be the one I interviewed that morning—who had suddenly become the most famous, or the most tragic person in America." Then, after a pause, she added: "There, but for the grace of God, goes any one of us."

From the news, too, she drew columns that reflected situations familiar to many of her correspondents. A woman wrote her: "You're always talking to us about thinking of our homes, and not running around. Then I pick up the paper every day and see how all our 'best people' are doing exactly that—getting crazy drunk, shifting husbands and wives, and breaking any rule you want to name. Should we have two standards, one for people like them and another for people like me?" To such questioners, Dorothy Dix said, she addressed such columns as the one written in April of 1908 about the Alfred Vanderbilt divorce suit.

She had just read that the couple had "gone the traditional way of the multimillionaire" to the divorce court. Nobody was surprised, said Dorothy Dix. Among the wealthy the rattle of domestic skeleton bones had become as familiar as the clink of their gold.

She went on to say that Senator La Follette had had no difficulty

naming a hundred millionaires who dominated the country. He would have been hard put to pick a mere dozen with happy marriages. It appeared no harder for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to keep out of the divorce courts. Nobody contended, Dorothy said, that a millionaire could not be as moral as a pauper; the fact remained that most millionaires were simply not trained to be good husbands.

Anyone born to great wealth went into matrimony as unprepared for "the self-control, self-suppression and sacrifice it demands" as was a soft-muscled baby for a prize fight. All his life the man had been coddled; marrying, he discovered someone else with wishes and tastes to be considered, "somebody else with nerves and a temper." A husband who was poor, meeting matrimonial snags, had to adjust himself to them and try to live peacefully; the millionaire had only to take his automobile or yacht and slip away.

Furthermore, observed Miss Dix, the rich couple never became really necessary to one another, mutually dependent as were poorer couples. The husband who had to work hard for a living rarely stopped to think whether his wife had turned into what he considered a bore. On the other hand, "the man who has nothing to do but pursue that will-o'-the-wisp happiness and to sit with his fingers on his pulse counting his emotions, would find fault with the most perfect wife ever created."

Dorothy now had a definite and pleasant place in New York's life. Warren Gilmer—George's nephew—tells of memorable evenings when she took him to Broadway first nights. "I was astonished to see that so many people knew her. As we walked down the aisle, men got up and women waved; from the boxes others bowed. Grace George spoke to her as 'Dorothy, my dear,' and one of the Barrymores walked over to chat. Between the acts she introduced me to a stockbroker and a pair of politicians. I suddenly understood that Lizzie Gilmer had got to be somebody."

Organizations like the Dixie Club of New York, and literary groups and women's organizations sought her, and she made talks on occasion. A number of society women of upper Fifth Avenue asked her to call for teas and parties; accepting some invitations, she went without George. "But I wasn't really a lion, not even a

junior lioness," she told a New Orleans acquaintance. "And if I seemed to be, it was because some folks impressed very easily!" Nevertheless she had gained in looks as well as self-command; photographs of the period show her with a fresh vitality, a gaiety of manner that had not been hers before.

Settled more securely than at any time since her first days at Woodstock, Dorothy could exercise her taste for hospitality, indulge her liking for people. From time to time, returning from an out-of-town story or finishing a heavy accumulation of letters, she would give a small party. The furnished apartment had a large double room from which she could see the Hudson, and several smaller ones, including a kitchen in which she had just enough space in which to stand up and cook. It was pleasant and airy, and she had added her own touches in pictures and ornaments.

By and large her best friends were men and women connected directly or indirectly with newspapers. At the Thaw trial she had come into daily contact with Irvin S. Cobb of the World—a biglipped young man with a southern heritage like hers. Cobb did a marathon job on the trial, turning out countless thousands of words; in quiet moments between Evelyn's sobs, he noticed Dorothy.

They had met before, but here for the first time Irvin Cobb saw her in action and was fascinated by her method. "She memorized their faces, studying every line, every twitch of the finger, the way they wet their lips. She would turn away, close her eyes, then look back, as if she wanted to know them by heart. All I could think was that I'd hate to have that little demon of a reporter poking her eyes over me!" Soon Cobb was joining others at her apartment, and their friendship lasted for many years.

Irvin Cobb told of her reaction to one of his pranks. Finding her staring at a large window full of silk stockings, he called out: "Little one, I'll buy you anything you like there!" Dorothy whirled around, then murmured: "Oh, it's only you. I thought for a moment I'd been insulted at last."

At the Thaw trial Dorothy had the duty of bringing a young artist to the court—a girl with fluffed-out hair, newly arrived from Denver. Dorothy guided her to the press section, where she was

unnoticed, possibly because no one paid much attention to the indifferent artists who came and went at the trial, turning in uninspired cartoons and drawings. But when the young newcomer's first sketch appeared, readers of the Journal put down their coffee cups and stared: here, in a whirl of floating lines, was an Evelyn Nesbit more beautiful than the one in real life. When they glanced down at the signature at the bottom of the picture, they saw the name Nell Brinkley.

Dorothy Dix, nearly thirty years her senior, would not forget the days when she "nursemaided the baby star." This creator of the Fluffy-Ruffles Girls had a shy manner—she was almost as small as Dorothy—and, despite a later air that many thought flighty, she possessed a determination that matched Miss Dix's own. The two were alike in another respect; in the midst of excitement and confusion they maintained a calm self-possession, always a bit apart from the turbulent world in which they moved.

Through the Thaw trial and through many trials that followed, Nell Brinkley became a close friend of Dorothy. They frequently formed a team, working side by side on some cases. Dorothy saw hundreds of Brinkley girls emerge on the drawing board—always the feathery, demure type, with long lashes, rosebud mouths, and silken hair, and with dimpled cupids floating in the sky above them. Arthur Brisbane, who kept a careful hand over Miss Brinkley's career, assigned her only to cases involving young and handsome women, type-cast in advance to the Brinkley roles.

On Dorothy's apartment walls hung several Brinkley originals, which a number of people, around 1910–15, thought the best things in the place. However the critics regarded her, Nell became fantastically popular. Housewives and college boys clipped out her drawings. Follies girls tried to dress like them, and Nell, returning the compliment, immortalized Mae Murray, Billie Burke, and other Ziegfeld players in her drawings. She made them, as some said, look more like themselves than they really were. The American public reached out for Brinkley dresses, Brinkley hats, Brinkley toilet water . . .

With Dorothy Dix, Nell went to Chicago, to New Jersey villages, to the Tombs. The artist had a flair for dramatics that amused the

matter-of-fact Miss Dix. She would finish drawings in cabs, or use the plump back of an obliging policeman as an easel while the crowd gaped. Dorothy, who admired Nell for her endless industry, smiled gently at a criticism of Nell's highly romantic style. "No, people don't look like that. Isn't it a shame they don't?"

Dorothy went occasionally to the "salon" of Ella Wheeler Wilcox—author of Poems of Passion—who was also tiny and pretty, but, unlike Dorothy, utterly without humor. A woman of eminently mediocre gifts, Ella was a relentless declaimer of platitudes, and as such enormously successful. For a time Dorothy had looked on at a distance as Ella moved around New York in floating draperies, announced that she took milk baths à la Anna Held, and lay like a banal Madame Récamier, on a couch about which her friends would assemble.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox had preceded Dorothy to the Journal's editorial page, and gradually their work brought them into contact. Calling at the Wilcox ménage, Dorothy let her sharp eyes pass over the scene and listened to Ella's pronouncements on America, Europe, art, and the afterlife. Twenty years later she recalled the poet "reclining like Cleopatra on a barge-like couch." Dorothy also took note of Ella's adoring husband, and observed that it would be wonderful to have such a man around the place, drinking in her utterances—even, as she understood, bringing her breakfast to the bedside.

Dorothy also made friends with the "Gibson boy" of the day the cleft-chinned Richard Harding Davis, who looked like an Arrow collar advertisement. Newspapermen less heroic in manner snickered at the gallant young man, who enjoyed covering wars as much as writing of the social world to which he belonged.

Dorothy Dix considered Dick Davis "as dashing as his stories," but once she told about a more mundane foreign correspondent who met up with Richard and reminded him of an earlier meeting. Davis was pompously regretful: "Old chap, I'm afraid I've forgotten you." To this the old chap smiled: "That's all right. I remember you, Jack London." And he walked away.

Samuel Hopkins Adams was another of Dorothy's friends. During the trial of Harry Thaw, they shared a conviction that old Mrs.

Thaw bore the basic responsibility for the whole affair. Dorothy, though she won Mrs. Thaw's interest and was received at the Thaw home, still regarded the dowager as an imperious fool, though occasionally a pathetic one, who had wrecked her son's life. Adams praised Dorothy, a star of the press table, for her generosity to him, a still-rising sprout, during the days of the trial. When he wrote a page for the World about Evelyn Nesbit's diary, Dorothy took the time to write him a pleasant note, telling this competitor how effective a job he had done. As always, she let others know when she admired their work.

With guests at the apartment George Gilmer was quiet, usually dignified to the point of solemnity. Sometimes, however, he would not be present and Dorothy would make a quick explanation: George just wasn't feeling up to it, or he had a business matter to attend to and sent his regrets. People nodded and asked no more. . . . Another member of the family was occasionally there—Will Douglas Meriwether, Dorothy's gay-hearted father, who came to New York every year or so to visit with the Gilmers.

Dorothy happily welcomed "Pa" as she could not have welcomed him in earlier, poorer years; and Pa's pride in her was obvious as they walked along Broadway or Fifth Avenue or to the theater. Although he was past seventy his eyes remained brightly alert, his mind good, his mood buoyant. He welcomed all callers genially, and most of them gathered around the tall man with the white mustaches to listen with pleasure to his stories and recollections.

Will Meriwether preferred young people. "That old fogy," he would say of someone who was ten or fifteen years his junior, "dead and don't know it." His scorn was strong for those who grew dull or jaundiced with the years; he stayed youthful in spirit and eye until the end. When he was almost eighty, he still had an eye for the ladies. After a good-looking one went by, he would wink and say to a friend: "Nice figure, eh? And a lot of money. Suppose I marry her, and we can have a lot of fine parties and travels!"

In a crowd he would stop suddenly and call out to a man he had recognized: "Don't you remember? We met forty-three years

back, on a Sunday in January, in Nashville. You told me you suffered from hives, and your daughter fell off a horse in school. How's your wife?" The details he carried in his head were not merely phenomenal; they were accurate.

In Dorothy's apartment her father sat about reading everything—newspapers, magazines, books; and everything reminded him of something else. While George Gilmer remained silent, Pa Meriwether talked a lot, maintaining a lively interest in politics, social affairs, finance. He would argue the stock market with any broker and correct him on quotations. Dorothy learned to watch out for that. With his everlasting optimism, Pa was ready to invest anything he owned in a fly-by-night venture.

To middle-aged visitors Will Meriwether was often dismayingly frank with advice: "You girls ought to perk up. Use some paint! You're getting no younger, you know." Cigarettes were slowly becoming fashionable, and he walked into the apartment one day with bright new holders in his hands. "Use them, all of you," he told the girls, and saw to it that some of them did. Dorothy tried cigarettes once or twice, spluttered, and gave them up, to her father's annoyance. "You're just old-fashioned," he complained.

Pa Meriwether returned more and more frequently to New York, and he and his daughter looked forward to each opportunity to be together. She missed her sister Mary, from whom she had been separated for years, and her brother Ed, who was still down in New Orleans. "Some day we'll be together again; I've promised it to myself," a friend heard her say.

A rich and colorful New Orleans beverage, whose preparation had delighted Dorothy, was café brûlot, or burning coffee. Lights were put out and the rite performed as hosts and guests stood around a blazing bowl. Some Orleanians have thought this the transcendental beverage of their food-and-drink-loving town. Seeing it in Creole homes, Dorothy had been intrigued by the drama of the occasion. "It makes coffee-drinking almost like a stage play," she said.

Once she held the ceremonial in her New York apartment, and there were immediate demands for its repetition. For years thereafter she regularly had café brûlot parties. From New Orleans she imported a silvered copper set—a large bowl rather like a loving cup, with a tray beneath and a long-handled ladle. Over and over she had to explain the process:

The brûlot basis is a mixture of cognac, sugar, spices, orange and lemon peel, set to steep in advance in the big bowl. Into the tray on the dining-room table is poured a small amount of alcohol to be ignited, and the coffee—the steaming, well-dripped Creole kind—is brought in. Lights go off, a match is touched to the alcohol in the tray below, and in the darkness flames encircle the bowl holding the spiced mixture. As the brew is stirred, the coffee is poured in slowly; the contents of the bowl itself now ignite, and the blue flames dance above and below the silver bowl.

Over the bowl stood Dorothy Dix—tiny, round of figure, Buddha-like eyes intent on the rite, her child's hand grasping the ladle and lifting it high in the air to form ribbons of flame that followed in its wake. It was a scene her friends loved.

And she loved the brûlot. "It's a liquid fruitcake," she would say. That description intrigued a British guest; "Miss Dix," he told her a bit later, "you named it perfectly—liquid plum pudding." Miss Dix nodded, then observed to a relative: "Plum pudding! With patriotism like that, who can doubt there'll always be an England?"

Her brûlot usually brought to mind O. Henry, one of her most admiring friends. Fascinated by the ceremony, he came repeatedly to her apartment, alone or with two or three others who knew her; for him and the rest of the company, she would brew the brûlot. O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) detested formal parties, and tossed away hundreds of invitations from men and women who hoped to lure him to their drawing rooms. "I suppose I was one of the few he would visit," Dorothy said. "I never had to press him. He understood he would find fellow newspaper folk there, without a single dowager in hailing distance."

He and Dorothy often talked together of "his" people and "hers," the young and old, fighting hard for a living, who he portrayed in his short stories, and the equally plain ones who wrote to her. They exchanged observations, "and he asked me one question after another about my correspondents—what made them

send their messages, just how they phrased questions, how they took advice. I learned a great deal from him, of course; who wouldn't have learned from O. Henry? If I contributed a footnote to his wonderful knowledge of humankind, I can be grateful."

O. Henry had come to know men and women to whom life had been harsh, and who had acquired courage and self-denial in the process. For the "softlings" he had only scorn; and he and Dorothy Dix had a great deal to say to one another on this subject. . . . As to the brûlot, she remembered that he "admired to watch," in the Southern phrase, the leaping of the flames, sometimes two feet into the air, as she raised the shining ladle with its well-brandied contents. "He certainly liked coffee!"

He attended one such festive evening shortly before his death in 1910. "He drank eight cups in succession—and died almost immediately afterward," she said in gentle humor. Again and again through the years that followed, she reread O. Henry, finding a great deal of her friend in his stories, and reflecting on parallels between those stories and her own letters.

These letters sometimes were as well plotted as any work of fiction. Early one morning she read a note from a schoolteacher in Michigan which told how the girl was gradually being talked into an affair. "I love him a great deal. If I live with him for six months, he will marry me." In the meantime, Dorothy's maid had prepared breakfast biscuits, and the aroma of coffee was coming from the cubbyhole kitchen. Dorothy called out: "Just bring the coffee to my desk." There, sipping and thinking and sipping again, she wrestled with the problem of the schoolteacher. Then her pen began to skim across the page:

Why should he marry you after six months if he won't do it now? Do you really believe anybody who suggests he will marry you after he's had you a while? My dear child, there is nothing new about this man's arguments. They are the old ones that every seducer has used since the beginning of time. Marriage is nothing but a contract that carries with it certain specific obligations and responsibilities. It is a legal and binding partnership into which a man and woman enter, and which they cannot break without pay-

ing certain penalties. It has its faults, but it is the best arrangement that civilization has yet been able to work out for the protection of the woman and the child.

Just ask yourself these questions: "If this man loves me, why isn't he willing to marry me honorably and give me a respectable place in society, instead of making me a declassed woman? If he intends to be faithful to me, why isn't he willing to enter a marriage contract?"

Then Dorothy made a suggestion: The girl should not only say no to the man but she should get out of town to make sure she did not see him again and run the risk of hearing his proposals a second time. . . . Sealing the letter, she attached a special-delivery stamp and sent the servant to the nearest post office, to be there when it opened. Her promptness and her advice paid off. Months later the young woman wrote from Baltimore. She had found a job there and had met a great many new people. By the time Miss Dix received this letter, she would be married.

Recounting the incident, Dorothy Dix added: "My biscuits got cold that morning. But it was worth it."

CHAPTER 12

Postgraduate Course

1909, 1910, 1911, 1912 . . . for the weak and the undefended, New York could be a harsh place. Dorothy Dix would remember these years for a series of tragic stories which took her from Chinatown to the East Side slums and back to handsome upper-class suburbs.

In Tennessee and in New Orleans she had known many shy, retiring people, and from her letters she had come to understand something about people who lacked the necessary strength and toughness of fiber to face life. Many of these cases involved the weak and the afraid. For Dorothy Dix each had an immediate and moving effect.

The first of this series of cases struck close to home, for she already knew a member of the victim's family. The name of General Franz Sigel was well known in New York, and Dorothy had met and liked one of the daughters-in-law of the late soldier who had fought in the Civil War. Daily she passed the General's statue on Riverside Drive, and once or twice she had heard of his grand-

daughter Elsie—a pretty, rather enigmatic girl who did settlement work in Chinatown.

In June of 1909 the Journal heard vague stories that the nine-teen-year-old Elsie Sigel had been missing for days from her Washington Heights home. A telegram signed with her initials had arrived from Washington, D.C., asking her family not to worry. When she did not return, the Sigels made inquiries in their neighborhood and in the Chinese district. Members of Elsie's family had little to say and denied rumors that they had ordered a young Chinese to stay away from her. Also they said it wasn't true that she had developed close friendships with several other Orientals.

Now a Chinese restaurant owner went to the police, reporting that two men who worked for him and who had known Miss Sigel had disappeared. Officers broke into the room above the restaurant previously occupied by Leon Ling, one of the missing men. The bed, covered with a silk canopy, stood undisturbed. In one corner of the room they noticed a flat trunk securely tied with cords. When the police cut the fastenings and lifted the cover they found the body of Elsie Sigel. She had been strangled to death.

Most of her clothes and other signs of identification had been removed. The murderer, however, seemed to have left hurriedly, and had not been careful enough. In the room investigators discovered dozens of letters from the girl, showing her infatuation for Leon Ling, the difficulty she was having with her family over him, and the course of a stormy love affair. It was evident from the letters that at one time Elsie feared that Leon was deserting her, while later ones indicated that they apparently became lovers again.

Dorothy Dix soon established and reported the fact that the General's granddaughter had been fond of several Oriental men. Elsie had known the Chinese section for years, since her mother first took her there to do missionary work. As time went by Elsie had had numerous dates with Chinese. Leon Ling was a handsome, smiling youth, thoroughly Americanized. He slicked down his hair and wore loud clothes cut on "classy" lines.

Elsie had begun by instructing Leon in English and religion.

He had obviously had other American girls, too, for in his room the police picked up stacks of untouched Bibles, gifts of sometime Sunday-school teachers, a large assortment of pictures of the teachers, together with affectionate letters from several of them. Only a few days before the girl disappeared, the young "sport," as his Chinese friends called him, had had a fist fight over Elsie on Pell Street with Chu Gain, who had had a better-paying job in the same restaurant and was also missing.

Investigators managed to locate Chu Gain. The mild-mannered boy wept and said he knew nothing about the case. After days of questioning he told varying stories, then admitted that he, too, had been in love with the girl and had received letters from her. The more dominant Leon had been furious and had quarreled with Elsie and Chu. When Leon threatened, Chu stayed away from Miss Sigel for a time, fearing that Leon would kill him. He claimed to be entirely ignorant of the murder, but finally conceded that Leon had told him one night how he had choked Elsie in a quarrel . . .

"I combed Chinatown from one end to the other," Dorothy Dix wrote. Talking to many people who knew the principals, she put together the important facts behind this strange story. Elsie's family had not done well, and she grew up a drudge who received castoffs. Her clothes were such, Dorothy said, that the average servant woman would not have been seen in them. Lonely and unhappy, Elsie did not even have one or two close girl friends—a fact that Miss Dix thought unusual and significant.

Having no social life among her own kind, Elsie Sigel had sought it elsewhere. In Chinatown she had met a welcome, together with a flattering interest, and, as a result of years of visits there, she had lost her prejudices against Orientals. Then, too, as Dorothy Dix noted, Miss Sigel had reached "the love time of life," and here were young men impressed with her presence who did not look askance at her attire when they took her to the Mott Street restaurants.

"The tides of life ran warm and sweet in her veins, and she longed for love and the gaiety that belongs to youth, just as any other girl does. Circumstances threw her almost entirely in the society of Chinamen, and so she coquetted first with one and then another and became, in a way, a little belle of Chinatown." From her own readings Dorothy recalled that Oriental literature was filled with allusions to the beauty of white-skinned girls, whom the poets compared with moonbeams and snow on the breasts of mountains. "She was not like their own women—a meek creature to be given in marriage like a bale of dry goods. She was piquant and petulant," with a self-will that must have fascinated the Orientals.

She took the risks of having two men fight over her. Yet when had that seemed an unpleasant idea to a young woman? Reading the girl's correspondence, Dorothy concluded that Elsie had written the two men "with impartiality," anxious to appeal to both. With Leon she had told of her love, quarreled, then drawn him back "by the old feminine trick of tears reminding him of her sacrifices." Whatever the facts of her last dispute with Leon, Elsie herself had all but invited her own death.

The Orient had long fascinated Dorothy Dix. At Woodstock she had pored over volumes of translations from the Chinese and Japanese, and in later years she was to surround herself with Oriental furnishings. Now she visited countless places in the Mott Street vicinity, describing everything she saw. Sitting with a Chinese at dusk, half-hidden by window curtains, she told how the twisting streets suddenly swarmed with life as silent men stepped out to smoke in doorways, leaned against the houses in groups, or hurried by with hands in sleeves.

Chinatown had certain white women—among them gold-toothed derelicts who had arrived at the "end of the toboggan slide of a wasted life." As a missionary told Dorothy, the Chinese man did not seek them; they went to him. He fed and clothed them and was almost always good to them. But there were other American girls whose lives were wrecked here when they came down on slumming parties and ended up in opium joints.

Dorothy Dix observed that there had been, of course, many honorable marriages between Americans and Chinese—marriages in which women of maturity chose men they loved and remained good wives. For the Elsie Sigels, however, she felt that mission work presented a great risk:

A woman has never yet been able to distinguish between a man's soul and himself, and her interest in the one merges into her regard for the other. Her efforts for his salvation bring her into a close personal intimacy; she must . . . always have him in her thoughts, in her prayers, on her heart, and so it is no wonder that the preacher is so often supplanted by the admirer.

For these young mission women there was the appeal of the unknown, made all the more exciting by an atmosphere of dangerous perfumes and silks heavy with gold embroidery, by the subtle suggestion of sandalwood and carved ivories. Dorothy Dix came to the conclusion that the Chinatown missions should use only male workers.

For weeks the Sigel case remained a story of national interest, with wild rumors linking it with tong wars, and with appeals to Chinese all over the country to give up the missing man. Then slowly the case slipped out of the papers and remained a mystery. In years to come Dorothy would refer to it when she was discussing young women in "the love time of life."

There was another incident a short time later which stirred her deeply because it involved a working girl. She thought she understood better than most did the problem of Ruth Wheeler, aged fifteen and a half, who had taken a course in stenography, answered a post card from a potential employer, and then disappeared. In her tenement flat Ruth's sister told Dorothy Dix about it.

Years earlier Ruth Wheeler's father had died in a railroad accident, leaving four children. Mrs. Wheeler took in sewing and "plain dressmaking," and the oldest daughter—the only one of working age—ran errands in an office, then worked up until she had a job as a bookkeeper. "Mother and I kept the family together, and we were able to give the others more advantages than I had," the girl explained. The next girl attended a business college and became a stenographer, and then Ruth went to the same school.

"We've worked hard, but we've been happy in this little place," the sister went on. Ruth had been quiet, gentle, an avid reader, looking even younger than she was. After she finished her secretarial course, Ruth received a card asking her to call about a job, signed by a man named Wolter. She went off that morning—"so happy at the prospect of being able to help our mother."

Returning at seven that night, the older sister found Mrs. Wheeler much disturbed because Ruth had not come home. They telephoned the school and received Mr. Wolter's address, and Miss Wheeler went immediately to his rooming house. The janitress recognized the description and said that she had talked to a girl like that in the morning and had sent her up to his room. It didn't take Miss Wheeler very long to find Wolter's room and rap on the door, which was eventually opened by another young woman, a stranger to Miss Wheeler. A young man with a lean, pasty face, obviously Albert Wolter, was lying half-dressed on the bed.

In answer to Miss Wheeler's questions, Albert Wolter said he did not know what she was talking about. When she persisted he began to curse her. Close to tears, she accused him of hiding her sister and ran about the room, opening closets. She found nothing and, realizing the hopelessness of learning anything from Wolter or his companion, decided to leave. The door into the hall was locked. Staring at her in a strange way, Wolter moved toward her and she cried: "You'd better let me go! There's a policeman downstairs." That remark had effect, and he allowed her to unlock the door.

By the next day Wolter and his roommate had moved out, though they had paid rent a week in advance. The landlord inspected the room, but there were no clues. For days after calling the police the Wheelers waited apprehensively. Then another tenant at Wolter's former address reported a large bundle in the court below. He had seen Wolter deposit the package on the fire escape. When it got in his way, the other tenant said he had knocked it to one side and it had fallen into the courtyard. Perhaps the parcel should be investigated.

When it was opened the police found charred bones, hairpins,

and the twisted steel of a girl's corset. Upstairs, searching harder, investigators learned that the fireplace had been newly painted, as if to hide evidences of use. In the grate lay wisps of hair and scalp.

The police tracked down Albert Wolter, but he denied everything. Shown the girl's umbrella, and the rubber stamp he had used for signing the post card—both found in the closets of the abandoned room—he merely shrugged. Studying Wolter, Dorothy Dix thought him no different at first glance from any village loafer—"those cigarette-smoking youths who hang around poolrooms, good-for-nothing louts who sponge on their mothers."

He appeared a mere stripling, smooth-faced and undeveloped in physique. His large nose came to a point above a mouth that had almost a cupid's bow. Weakness was its keynote, also ill temper and selfishness. The more Dorothy looked at Wolter the more convinced she became that the killing was an accident, and the result of panic.

Ruth Wheeler had perhaps struggled and, without realizing what he was doing, he had choked her. The other young woman apparently had been away at the time, and was still unaware of what had happened when Ruth's sister arrived. The police guessed that while Miss Wheeler was searching the room for a living Ruth she must have been within inches of discovering Ruth's body, which Wolter had hastily concealed.

Dorothy Dix inquired into the boy's background. His father and mother had not married; the mother had spoiled him badly as a child. "Self-control and an orderly life she could not teach him, because she did not know them herself." When they moved to New York, Albert found his proper level in dance halls and gamblers' hangouts. Learning that young girls could be salable merchandise, he went into the white-slave business on a small scale. This was his purpose in luring young stenographers to his room.

Albert Wolter would betray no more girls. In less than a month after the death of Ruth Wheeler, he had been arrested, tried, and convicted, and was soon executed. Dorothy Dix observed that some people regarded the working woman as "a freak, a curious, restless, ambitious female, scorning home for the excitement of a

career." This she called wicked nonsense; circumstances almost always thrust such a girl into the business world, to survive or starve. And, always practical, Dorothy proposed a way to prevent other Ruth Wheeler cases: laws to make business schools check on the reliability of the employers to whom they sent their graduates.

Dorothy Dix covered next the celebrated case of Lieutenant Charles Becker of the New York police force, who protected and shook down the city's gambling. Many present-day disclosures of tie-ups between the underworld and law enforcers seem pallid as compared with that story of 1911 and 1912, as she wrote it, and no male correspondent gave a more vigorous picture of the brutalities associated with it.

Lieutenant Becker headed the strong-arm squad which supposedly stopped gambling on the East Side. Instead Becker became czar of the "joints," and ran his own gambling place with one Herman Rosenthal. Differences broke up this team, and Rosenthal looked on, furious and helpless, as Becker's men wrecked his property. But later Rosenthal went to the mayor and police commissioner with proof of Becker's criminal duplicity.

As Dorothy Dix explained, neither official would pay any attention to Rosenthal, and so he tried the newspapers and the district attorney. The papers printed something, and the district attorney showed considerable interest, arranging for Rosenthal to see him the following day with his evidence.

Rosenthal did not keep the appointment. About 2:30 A.M. he was called out of a Times Square restaurant, and four men in a car shot him to death. When they were arrested they remained silent until several intermediaries turned state's evidence. It developed that Lieutenant Becker himself had hired the four men to commit the murder, at a price of \$1,000 each.

Writing in a passion of indignation, Dorothy Dix told how those who testified for the state related, matter-of-factly, that the gangsters had been paid to kill a man they did not know even by sight. No persuasion had been needed; they had not haggled over the price. Jack Rose—one-time agent for Lieutenant Becker—ex-

plained with great simplicity how he had gone to see the leader of the gunmen and told him about the job. "You want us to croak Rosenthal? Sure, we'll do it."

At first there was a slip, and Becker grew furious. When Rose explained to Becker that a detective had been seen across the street, Becker shouted: "Detective nothing! Kill him right in front of a policeman if you want to. . . . Nothing can happen to you."

On the night of the murder, after word arrived that Rosenthal had been located, Jack Rose calmly enjoyed his meal until a telephone call came announcing that Rosenthal had just been killed in front of the Metropole. Rose then telephoned the happy news to Lieutenant Becker, who went to the station house to inspect the remains of the man he had ordered murdered.

As Dorothy Dix described it, the police officer gloated over the body, smiling to himself; he had got rid of Rosenthal as he said he would. Witnesses told how he rolled the corpse from one side to another, appraising the bullet wounds, the gaping mouth, and half-opened eyes. "The most pleasing sight I ever saw," Jack Rose heard Becker say. And the Lieutenant had added that if the district attorney had not come in, "I would have cut out his tongue and nailed it up against the wall as a warning to squealers." Miss Dix observed:

Murders there are in plenty, but mostly those who take a fellow creature's life seek to plead some extenuating circumstance, some jealousy or hate or the brooding over some wrong until it turns the mind awry—something with which we can humanly sympathize. Rose . . . told of going out and hiring the men to kill another man, simply to accommodate a friend, as calmly as you would tell of telephoning for a taxicab to oblige your guest.

Jack Rose's words provided a key to the whole trial, Dorothy felt. To her, he was a Doré who painted a strange region—"a different world from the world of honest, decent folk . . . a world of graft and thievery and cunning . . . of shadows full of crawling things and hideous night birds, a world inhabited by thugs and assassins and draggled women of the street. A different world from that most of us inhabit, thank God."

She thought that Rose was as typical and picturesque a gambler as one of Bret Harte's mining-camp figures. A man of native intelligence, he had the noncommittal card-dealer's face—dead-white skin and totally bald head. With the grotesque face and a certain chipper manner, he needed only a ruff around his neck to resemble a Pierrot on the way to see Columbine, she first thought.

Then Dorothy Dix glanced behind the witness chair to the painting of the Three Fates; below the one who severed the thread of human life rested a skull. As Jack Rose gave the details of his part in the killing, "some horror—perhaps gathered by his subtle gambler's intuition from his audience—communicated itself to him, so that he seemed to age and wither right under our eyes." That colorless face became as ghastly as the skull behind him; he was no longer Pierrot, but a man trying to save his own life by telling the truth about another.

Dorothy surveyed Lieutenant Becker, too, as he stared at the underling who had turned on him. A heavy-bodied fellow, his huge shoulders bent forward and his hairy hands playing with a pencil, Becker had overpowering confidence; he would remain his own law. "It would be impossible for any face to express keener shrewdness or brute strength or determination. . . . You think of the primitive man, standing with his club and his lips snarled into a kind of smile, waiting for the pack of wolves to come on."

Becker grinned at particularly telling bits of testimony, defying his accusers. Boldly he carried in his pocket a newspaper with flaring headlines. "Becker Ordered Him to Kill Rosenthal." As the case built up, Dorothy thought it turned time back several centuries. A listener might feel himself "in Venice with the Council of Ten, when a man could slip a bit of paper bearing his enemy's name into the Lion's mouth, and the poor wretch was seized, dragged before the Doge and borne across the Bridge of Sighs, to be seen no more. . . . Or you are in the days before the French Revolution, when a man in power could get a lettre de cachet that sent someone who stood in his way to rot in the Bastille."

At the back of the courtroom waited Becker's wife—small, delicate-featured, with "the prim and precise look that many years of school teaching set ineffaceably on a woman." Half-hidden, Mrs. Becker listened attentively, as immobile as a wax dummy. She heard her husband portrayed as a monster, a thief, a grafter, and worse, and still she appeared as unmoved as if children were reciting multiplication tables before her. Nor did she show emotion as witnesses spoke of the sadism of Becker—a "tough detective" who delighted in beating his victims. In spite of her expressionless face, Mrs. Becker had Dorothy's sympathy, for she was pregnant, and the man she loved faced the death sentence.

How much did Mrs. Becker know of his operations? She testified at length about his financial dealings, telling how she banked many thousands of dollars for him. Dorothy reported that this was the money "he was so fortunately able to save out of his small salary as a lieutenant." Had he advised his wife also of his plans for murder? Dorothy looked at the "tight, thin lips" and felt certain that the Sphinx would talk before Mrs. Becker did.

After many delays the case ended with death for the policeman and his four gunmen friends, and a cleaning up of the city's police department, at least for the time being. Meanwhile, Dorothy Dix had had a postgraduate course in some strange aspects of twentieth-century attitude and character.

"She's a Momma and Poppa Wrapped in One!"

n December of 1913 Miss Dix opened the first letter in the heap of mail. "I believe this may be the best Christmas present you get," it began, and her correspondent, a widow, went on to tell how one of Dorothy Dix's columns, about the difficulties a mother-in-law could create in her son's house, had altered her life. The older woman, disliking her daughter-in-law and ready to "meet her in battle on any issue that arose," until very recently had been planning to remain indefinitely in her son's house.

Then she had read Dorothy Dix's advice to those in her position or her son's and daughter-in-law's: "Don't live with your parents or let your parents live with you. Old people are often self-centered and tyrannical; they get childish and have to be treated like spoiled children. Of course, children owe a great deal to their parents, but they do not owe the sacrifice of their entire lives, and I think there is no problem to which we bring so much mawkish sentimentality.

"Our duty to our parents demands that we love and cherish

them, that we show them affection and try to make them happy and contented, but it does not demand that we give up our lives to them and let them deprive us of all pleasure and happiness." To this Miss Dix had added that young couples had duties and problems to be adjusted in their own way, and in private. She suggested that a widowed mother-in-law get an apartment or room of her own, perhaps at a boarding place where she would meet others of her own age, with tastes in common. "Then, when she visits the younger people, her visit will be that much more welcome."

The writer of this pre-Christmas letter went on to say that on first reading Miss Dix's column she had slammed it to the floor, and gone to her room to brood. Gradually, however, she wondered if Dorothy had not been right. "I decided to try what you advised and moved out, and I've been a happier woman since then."

There was more to the note. Several months later the widow had read another Dix column about a woman in her early fifties, whose grown children had "gone about the business of life for themselves." In this case Miss Dix had urged remarriage, and had observed how easy it seemed for widowers to remarry, whereas a widow found it difficult to make acquaintances among men and get a husband. She had written:

If you want to catch fish you must go where the fishing is good. There's no use angling in a dry stream. A widow who lives alone in her own house is as sequestered from men as if she were in a nunnery or a grave. So, get out of it, and go live somewhere else where you will be brought into contact with something masculine besides the doctor and the preacher . . . The woman who wants to marry must emulate the mounted police and go out and get her man. It is enterprise that does it.

The Christmas-letter writer had profited by this counsel also. "It was a hard decision to make, but I had met the new man, and —well—you'd been right once, hadn't you?" So a month ago she had gone to the altar with him, and now she wanted Miss Dix to know she had been right a second time. The fifty-three-year-old bride was approaching what she felt sure would be her happiest

Christmas in years, and she thought she owed it to Dorothy Dix to tell her why.

That same holiday season Dorothy received a report from Dallas, Texas, on some advice she had given several months before. She had been unsure of her own opinion at the time and had worried about it, but her correspondent wrote:

Dear Dorothy Dix:

Four months ago I wrote you asking your advice about giving money to my son to marry on. I told you that he had a job, but it would take all his modest salary to live on and that he was too sensible to marry with nothing ahead. Also that he might lose the very fine girl he was in love with. I took your advice; I gave him one thousand dollars to put in the bank and five hundred to help furnish his home and go on a little trip.

And so they were married. They had a small church wedding, got beautiful presents and are as contented as they can be. I have never spent money that did me so much good. They are happy and young and in love, and for me to have done something to help just makes me overflow with joy. It was your advice that caused me to give them the money. Several kinfolks advised against it, but these are unusual times, and if a father doesn't come across in time of need, who will? Thank you.

A ONCE-ANXIOUS FATHER.

On the lighter side was a note, one of many, from a man who wondered if Miss Dix might not be a "widow woman." He wrote to her in purple ink to explain that he was a bachelor of sixty-five, with a real sizable Nebraska farm:

I don't know what your circumstances might be, but by your good common sense, sympathetic advice and splendid writing all the time, I am sure you would suit me all right if I would suit you. You may be married already, or you may not want to marry, but if you do I know you will be a dandy little wife, all right. If you don't want me yourself, please recommend me to another woman.

Similarly, a Louisiana Acadian of the bayou country, proposed to her, then added: "I am coming down your way with some fat beeves for market next month, anyway, and I can kill two birds with one stone." Miss Dix said that she declined to be killed with anybody's stone. Also, she noted in amusement, most of these petitioners, while observing that they loved her for herself alone, quickly added that they would be entirely willing to have her continue working.

Already she had had dozens of notes from lonely men and women who wanted a single small favor from her—a new wife or husband. "Most of them sounded like right nice folks," she commented, and certainly from all her letters she knew of fine middle-aged people who were lonely and would not object to meeting someone of the other sex. Usually the writers were prepared to offer character recommendations, letters from ministers and the like. But Dorothy Dix never agreed to run a marriage bureau on the side. Whatever the successes that might follow, the risks were not worth them. "I'd have more woes on my head than a hundred prophets," she insisted.

Once in a while she did serve as a marriage consultant, but only on an amateur basis and to help out close friends. The wife of a former city editor of the World tells how, shortly before the birth of their boy, her husband "fell one night into the hands of the Philistines and didn't get home all night." When he eventually arrived, she grew hysterical with self-pity and announced she was packing up and leaving him at once. Words led to more words, and a complete break threatened. The bleary-eyed husband departed for his office and a few hours later Dorothy Dix came to visit the wife, whom she had seen fairly often.

"We had a fine, long talk in which, without referring to my trouble, she told me more about her own domestic difficulties than she ever had told before," the wife remembers. "Then she said how wonderful it was that I would soon have a child and that I had a husband who cared for me so tenderly and so well. Of course, she convinced me; but she was so adroit and tactful that I never suspected collusion." Not until years later did she learn that her husband had telephoned his rival paper and that Dorothy Dix had interrupted a strenuous routine, giving up most of her morning, to help in this way.

Dorothy, with no children of her own, was intensely interested in other people's children and often played with them. One day a mother of three children found her with the youngest child in her arms, a look of serene contentment on her face. "As I approached I saw tears, and she told me: You're as rich as any woman in the United States.' There was a longing in her voice that made me want to cry."

For a little while the two women sat quietly together. "I thought she would say something more, but she didn't. I understood she was having some new troubles, and I could guess what they were about. Still, her code wouldn't let her tell me just what had happened, and I would have bitten off my tongue before I added to her sadness."

Whatever those troubles were—and they clearly involved her husband—Dorothy's apartment was run smoothly by Milly, a superb cook from New Orleans, whose son later became a Negro doctor widely known in New York. Dour, almost unemotional, Milly provided flawless meals and made certain that nobody, including nosy visitors, tampered with the constantly increasing stocks of letters on Dorothy's desk. It was Milly who put one lightminded young caller in her place when she discovered the girl riffling through the mail.

"Please, Ma'am"—Milly cleared her throat—"Miz Gilmer don't even let me touch letters from those people."

Milly was no all-suffering doormat; she knew her rights as an employee. She also understood values in food. Dorothy Dix's affection for good provender was unfeigned, her contempt great for inadequate or flavorless meals. She had a "strong weakness" for hot breads and gauged a cook's prowess by her ability to turn out biscuits. Sometimes, however, Miss Dix's inclination toward economy warred with her admiration of proper food. "Couldn't you cut down a mite on the butter?" she once asked Milly. That priestess of the culinary temple replied stiffly: "Yes'm. I can cook poor if you want me to." Thereafter Dorothy kept silent about butter.

The wonders of Milly's cuisine stirred Dorothy's guests to imitation. Women would sometimes go to the kitchen to congratulate the cook, in the southern fashion, and also to ask for the recipe.

Dorothy chided Milly: "And you tell them what you put in your gumboes! You shouldn't give away your stock in trade." Milly stared back. "Yes'm. I tell 'em, but I don' tell 'em right."

Phlegmatic though she was, Milly gloated quietly over signs of her mistress's increasing fame. She brought back stories of local recognition: "At the corner I saw a woman nursing her baby and reading you at the same time." . . . "Lady down the street tell her husband everything you said in the paper today." In the latter case, however, honesty required Milly to add: "Then he got mad as pepper and told her if she do it again he'd hit 'er with the paper."

Dorothy appreciated this sort of thing. She had begun to collect reactions of this sort like the one from a Baltimorean: "Madame, have a heart and let up on people like me. My wife keeps quoting you about husbands with locks on their pockets, and needing surgical operations to get fifty cents. She says you must know me! Miss Dix, women like my wife already have enough to use against their husbands, without you coming along . . ."

Egotists of both sexes wrote her angry, baffled notes. One woman felt it was unfair for Miss Dix to refer to the fact that she spent much of her time keeping her china dogs free from dust. Five people had brought the reference to her attention. A man wanted Miss Dix to write a note giving assurance she had not had him in mind when she mentioned a husband who refused to see a Lillian Gish picture with his wife and had gone to a bar instead.

She could offset these, however, with tributes like the one from an Arkansas postmaster: "Miss Dix, I've been thinking over what you're always telling us. And I figured it out this way. You got a backbone that makes you say just what you think, and a funnybone that makes it easy for us to take it. A fine combination!"

An optometrist on upper Broadway printed on his test cards paragraphs from her column, and explained: "They might as well find out what's wrong with their marriage while they find out what's wrong with their eyesight."

Friends in the Bronx reported another strong admirer. A butcher with a Westchester Avenue shop exclaimed to his customers: "Ach, that Dorothy Dix. She's a momma and poppa wrapped up in one!" Not many, including sociologists and students of Ameri-

cana, have summed up more succinctly the peculiar accomplishment of the little woman with the dark eyes.

In keeping with her rise in prestige, Dorothy's salary increased several times; and in keeping with her salary, Dorothy could move again—this time not simply to a place within sight of much-admired Riverside Drive, but to the shining thoroughfare itself. The apartment in the building at 440 Riverside was larger and had a splendid view of the Hudson. "We country people like air and space, and I have them now," she explained.

For Milly, the cook, there was a good-sized kitchen, far more spacious than the former one. The remaining Meriwethers sent her some pieces of family furniture from Tennessee, and from New Orleans came other items that she had acquired down there—the ones with her old articles still pasted underneath. With her increasing book collection and an address about which her well-wishers no longer need "lie five blocks" . . . things had picked up a good deal.

Nevertheless, small setbacks could hurt her. She had long remembered with pride her early *Picayune* days, and the paper had continued her column without interruption all of these years, subscribing to the syndicate for it. Then, in 1909, Mr. Rapier—watchdog of the *Picayune* treasury—decided to cut costs by dropping Dorothy Dix. Concerning this, Dorothy wrote the young wife of Yorke Nicholson, whom she had once helped separate from his long childhood curls:

It quite broke my heart when Mr. Rapier decided that he didn't care to take my work any longer, but of course I understood that that was merely a business affair, and it did not affect my affection for him nor the paper, and still less make any difference in my feeling toward all of your family. I can never forget that if it hadn't been for Mrs. Nicholson I might never have gotten any show at all.

The Item snapped up the feature; thus New Orleans still had Dorothy Dix, who, as the town said, was as much a part of it as its traditional red beans and rice and its shrimp jambalaya. Neverthe-

less she admitted that she felt like someone "shoved out of the family." One of her few unwise business steps developed out of this incident, for at that time she sold part of her Picayune stock. Had she held it her estate might have been considerably larger.

By 1914 she had more personal problems. As his plans for an engine ran into snags, and then bogged down altogether, George Gilmer reverted to his "difficult" ways. When she went touring with him, he would drive for hours without speaking, paying no attention to what she said. A stranger, meeting him thus for the first time, judged him a hired chauffeur, though no chauffeur would have acted in quite that fashion.

Now and then George would leave the apartment to sit for hours in the parked car, brooding. He received a monthly check from the turpentine factory in New Orleans and, using these funds, would stay away from home for several days at a time. For the first time guests heard him occasionally criticize his wife—little sarcastic remarks which they took care not to repeat to her. She caught their echoes or their repercussions, of course. As some New Yorkers still recall, George would occasionally sit in the corner and fix his wife with stares of unconcealed hostility.

George was in his sixties now, and his physical health fluctuated. He had weeks of illness when he was in pain with arthritis or had recurring headaches; then for months he seemed entirely well. For the most part he refused to see his doctor, waiving Dorothy's advice. There had always been a certain barrier of age between them; now the emotional gap was widening.

One night after an uncomfortable evening, when George seemed irrational to the point of real menace, an old friend whispered to Dorothy: "Is it all right for us to leave you?" Only his alarm led him to voice the question.

Dorothy's face flushed. "Yes. He'll be better in the morning."

"But"—the friend groped for tactful words—"but meanwhile?"
"It will be all right. We won't be together till then." Head averted, Dorothy pressed the hand that held hers, and the caller left. Nearly thirty years afterward, the man remembered her look of humiliation.

More and more she talked with a few close friends about certain aspects of the murder cases she covered: Harry Thaw's insanity, the impulses that dominated unhappy, confused men. She conferred with George's doctor about his emotional state, and the answers were vague. They could not be sure, but perhaps if he had a great deal of rest and exercise, and traveled . . .

Travel. She caught at the word. It was what she had wanted for years—the fun she had put off because she did not have the time for it. She began to make plans for a six-week trip to Europe. Had it been just a trip for herself, she would have waited another few years. But now it was a necessity for George.

For weeks Dorothy Dix worked fifteen and sixteen hours each day to prepare columns in advance. But long before she was ready to sail Brisbane handed her a dispatch from Italy, reporting a cholera epidemic which threatened to sweep over all Europe. Doctors advised Americans to stay home. Fate had stepped in; Dorothy bowed to it and canceled the trip "because I could do nothing else."

It was of this period that she said in later years that she sometimes stood for several minutes before her apartment door, arguing with herself, drawing on every reserve of will power, before entering. It was at such times also that her friend O. Henry and his words about "softlings" came to mind. She had no intention of turning soft!

Only once, it appears, did she say something that betrayed the real situation. She was discussing with one of her colleagues on the paper the story of a girl who had jumped from her apartment window not far from the Gilmers'. "A lot of people have far more reason than that one," she said darkly. When he looked up in surprise, she moved quickly away.

Instead of the trip to Europe, she planned instead to take George on a motor trip through the New England states. Fearing that there might be some last-minute obstacle, she asked the Journal not to assign her to stories of disasters, trials, and murders until she returned.

For once no interruptions occurred, and in the three weeks of touring George's mental condition was definitely improved. When they returned to New York he suffered a mild relapse, but he remained better than before, and for this she was profoundly grateful.

But while her married life caused her a great deal of worry, Dorothy's business career was moving steadily forward. In December of 1913 and January of 1914, she scored probably the greatest single beat of her career. It was the story of a small-town scandal, the all but incredible case of a woman who had buried herself alive for an illegal love. Did Dorothy Dix's own uncertainties of this period heighten her perceptions? Whatever the reason, many newspaper contemporaries thought her report of the case her finest work.

Shortly before Christmas, in 1914, in the village of Monticello, New York, the leading lawyer—a former county judge and district attorney—had died, and a handsome woman had emerged from a tiny room, little more than a closet, behind a partition in his office. She had lived there nearly four years and nobody in the town had known of her or seen her during that time. Judge Couch had a wife and grown children, and none of them had suspected the stranger's presence. The incident had started a furor, and partly to protect the woman from newspapermen the police had arrested her.

"It's hard to believe," the city editor said to Dorothy. "But see what you can find out."

A half hour later Dorothy was on her way to Monticello. Arriving after dark on a bleak evening, she went directly to the jail. The sheriff was cross and unco-operative. As he had been telling other reporters all day, no one was going to see Miss Branch unless Miss Branch herself wanted it, and she'd told him to keep everybody away.

Dorothy Dix located a hotel and huddled in bed in an icy, unheated room. In the morning, perhaps, she'd think of something. But sleep did not come, and two or three hours later she jumped up shivering, took some paper from the desk, climbed back into bed, and wrote a note to Miss Branch. She said simply that she wanted to tell the truth about one of the most remarkable love stories of which she had ever heard. Miss Branch could be sure the reporters would not leave until they had the facts. Wouldn't it be

best to have them told sympathetically—by another woman? Snow was falling now, and although it would have done no harm to let the note wait until the next day, Dorothy rejected the thought, dressed again, and walked over to the jail. A drowsy guard let her in and agreed to deliver the note for a dollar. Still shivering, Dorothy waited until he shuffled back with the news that Miss Branch would see her at ten o'clock the next morning.

In the morning Dorothy returned to the jail, smiled at the sheriff, and sailed past him up the stairs. Adelaide Branch sat waiting, her agitation evident. It was evident, too, that this woman, probably in her late thirties, was both refined and sensitive. Miss Branch had eyes that were slightly slanted, and she looked somewhat foreign—perhaps Latin. She must once have been a vivacious, sprightly girl, but now the lovely face was marked by despair and a fear close to panic.

"Never have I seen so forlorn a figure, never a grief so overwhelming," Dorothy wrote later. In a low voice Miss Branch told her why she had agreed to receive her: "He always liked what you wrote, Miss Dix. We used to read your columns together, and talk them over. That's what made me decide——"

Adelaide Branch broke down and Dorothy Dix admitted that she, too, cried, "and when two women get to crying together, they're going to tell everything they know." Yes, Miss Branch said, for almost four years she had stayed there, behind a partition which did not reach the ceiling. Most of the time she had been afraid to move for fear that Judge Couch's callers would hear her.

"Had only one of those people heard me, the secret would have been out, and it would have ruined his law practice and his place in politics." She spoke quietly, as if this were something that anyone would understand. And so, she told Dorothy Dix, she had remained there like a ghost, except when the judge was alone in his office and they could have a few minutes together. She wore shoes with all-rubber soles, and rubber pads were installed under the furniture in her cell, so that if she moved anything during the day there would be no noise.

"Didn't you ever leave that room at all?" Dorothy Dix asked. Well, once Miss Branch had set foot on the ground outside; on a dark, hot night when she took a few steps outside the building—a night when a longing to see the outdoors had possessed her. On another evening she had needed a few feminine items, "and I just had to talk with some other woman. I begged him to take me somewhere, anywhere at all." And so Judge Couch had taken her in his carriage to a near-by town, where she chattered almost feverishly with the salesgirl. She returned immediately, and again all she heard of the outside world were the conversations that floated over the flimsy partition.

Dorothy, astonished by these disclosures, asked how she spent her time back there? There was a window in her cell which she could not sit near for fear she'd be seen from the outside, but it did give enough light so she could "read and read, some books a dozen times." She taught herself French and shorthand, and she sewed, as Dorothy wrote, "like Marianna in her moated grange, embroidering wonderful stitches upon linen and silk . . . waiting until night came."

As the woman spoke, Dorothy Dix noticed her clothes; with a start she realized that though they were of fine material and well cut, the style was years out of date. Truly she had turned her back on the world to be with her man.

"It seems, almost incredible that anyone could have endured living in her voluntary jail," Dorothy commented. "Prisoners tunnel through stone and risk death itself in order to attempt freedom. But this woman, who could have put on her hat and left her cell at any minute, stayed joyfully until death set her free."

Dorothy studied the pallid face, the dazed look, and she remembered something. Adelaide Branch was "like those prisoners in the Bastille who, when their prison walls were torn down, clung to their cells—unable to step into the sunlight and freedom." Surely, thought Miss Dix, this had been a remarkable love. "The supreme test of love is not death, but life—our willingness to bear anything, do anything for its sake; our willingness to pay whatever price it exacts, not only freely but gladly."

The love of Adelaide Branch and Judge Couch stood the test, the writer thought, enduring "under circumstances that not only robbed it of every vestige of romance and poetry but that filled it with every commonplace hardship." She added: "Many women have died and many would gladly die if necessary for the man they love, but how few would have the courage to live this life of hideous isolation for their lover?"

She described the room in which Adelaide had been hidden.

No place could have been less like the gilded and silk-lined nest of a "bel amie," no life more unlike the gay ones foolish young girls suppose such women lead. The room was small and bleak and barren; the partitions were boards that did not reach to the ceiling, and its furniture consisted of only the plainest and most necessary articles, with a coal oil stove on which to prepare meals.

No woman on earth could have less of the predatory about her, and no woman ever gave so much and got so little. . . . Any wife would have felt herself misused to have had to live in one back room of an office and cook on an oil stove . . . Whatever Couch made went to his family. Perhaps that was the way he squared things with his conscience. Anyway, Adelaide Branch knew it and she let him do it. She might have dipped her hands deep into his pocket; she might have cajoled him into making a will and leaving her all he had; but not one penny did she ask for herself.

Even now Adelaide cried out: "I'd do it over again tomorrow, if I could! In spite of everything I've been through, this scandal and notoriety, I don't have one regret . . . There's so little love in the world. Most women go through the world paupers in heart; I've been rich in love, and it's been worth everything."

She and the judge had first met fifteen years earlier. Adelaide's father, postmaster of a New York town, killed himself; two years later her mother died. The girl had nearly finished her course at normal school, making high grades, but she suffered a physical and emotional breakdown. Years earlier Dorothy Dix had faced a similar trial; she listened with more than usual understanding as Adelaide described her illness. Doctors urged her to get into the open air, build her strength back by selling books from door to door. This she did, and people liked the intent, attractive girl. In time she recovered and carried on a fair business.

One day in Monticello she met the Judge, and they were at-

tracted to each other at that first meeting. "But he couldn't marry me, and I understood," she told Dorothy Dix. For some years she lived in a small town near by, and Judge Couch went to see her whenever he could. After a time he suffered a leg injury and had difficulty in walking. He opened a new office and one evening he brought Adelaide there in the dark, to the room that was to be her cell.

The judge's residence was at the other end of town. Because of his leg, he had an excuse for living most of the time at his office. "He remained on good terms with his wife and daughter, although he went to his own house only for fresh clothes and to dine as a guest." When the judge's wife visited the office she sometimes wondered about the locked door. "There's nothing in there," he told her, and changed the subject.

Then, soon after dawn one Sunday morning, the Judge became critically ill. Early churchgoers saw a distraught stranger with streaming hair running through the streets to the doctor. After summoning help, she disappeared. Sometime later the doctor arrived at the office with the Judge's wife and daughter. Judge Couch was dead. As Dorothy Dix told it, the wife stared at the rear door:

"I wonder . . ."

"What is it?" asked the doctor.

"I wonder what's behind that door. Melvin would never let me go in there."

They tried the door, but found it locked. The doctor stood on a chair and looked over the partition. At that point they heard the voice of a woman choked with sobs—"Don't try to break in. I'll come out."

Adelaide Branch appeared, her graying hair in her eyes. She looked tenderly at the dead man, then whirled on his astounded wife. "The law may recognize you, but I'm his real wife. I'm the one he's loved!"

Attendants led Mrs. Couch away, and policemen seized Miss Branch. The judge's body was removed, but still they did not know what to do with this woman. She had no friends in town; she didn't have any plans, or anywhere to go. She wanted only to see him when they took him to the grave . . .

Already the town was stirred up, and the police had somehow to dispose of Miss Branch. In her possession they discovered six dollars of his money and they filed a charge of petty larceny; that at least would keep her from public attention for a time. The jailer's wife befriended her and for a day or two Adelaide lay listless in the cell. When the funeral took place, the family refused to let her attend. As the carriages passed the jail Adelaide ran to the window, her trembling fingers gripping the bars. The next day the judge's wife removed his possessions from the office and took a picture of him that Adelaide claimed. "They wouldn't let me have even that . . ." Adelaide told Dorothy Dix.

The woman described the misgivings that had bedeviled her during those years in the office, and for the first time she spoke of a suicide agreement. "Sometimes I would ask myself what good could have come to the world if we had denied our love . . . And again I thought perhaps we should have set our feet on the path of duty and clung to it at any cost to ourselves. I don't know. I threshed over the subject endlessly, in a circle of reasoning that had no beginning and no end. And Mr. Couch and I talked of many things—of his failing health and what I should do if he died. I intended going with him; I never intended to live after he died, but . . . when I saw him in his death struggle I hadn't the courage to kill myself." The woman's face showed weariness and frustration.

"Mr. Couch loved me as few women have ever been loved, and yet I was jealous of the woman who bore his name and was his wife in the eyes of society." Now at last, Miss Branch abandoned the air of bravado that had made her cry out that she felt no regret for anything she had done; she was a broken and unhappy woman.

Dorothy Dix's accounts, giving Adelaide's full story, were reprinted and quoted all over the country. She stayed in Monticello for a time, writing about the messages of friendship and sympathy that came to Miss Branch. Even in the little town, where the judge's family had been prominent for generations, there was strong feeling in favor of Adelaide. "There is no cry of the Magdalene here, no drawing away from her," Dorothy found, but only a wish "that such a love might have been differently bestowed."

To Adelaide Branch came offers from theatrical managers and the makers of motion pictures, and from publishers urging her to write her memoirs. She said she wanted only one thing: "the right to go away and hide myself." Then overnight she disappeared; "as none of the inhabitants of the village saw her arrival, so none saw her departure." And Miss Branch faded from the news.

Dorothy Dix contributed a moral to the story:

We may talk as much as we please about our right to live out our lives in our own way and to take our happiness as we find it. No man lives to himself alone. The fact remains that no man or woman without the pale is ever satisfied or contented.

The Bell Kept Ringing

You know, writing is like firing in the dark. You never know whether you hit anything or not. And so it is good to hear the bell ring every now and then.

Dorothy Dix

orld War I engrossed the country, and as the doughboys prepared to march off to the echoes of "Keep the Home-fires Burning," young men and their sweethearts wrote to Dorothy Dix: Should they marry, or wait? How much money did a couple really need to plan a home? . . . The suffragette movement surged up overnight, and girls in "sensible" coat-suits demanded that Miss Dix take a stand for or against them. As a matter of fact, practically every group in the country seemed to be writing her in 1915–16.

More and more women asked her for advice on matters in which it would have been all too easy for her to make a dangerous error. There was a middle-aged wife with cancer and a younger one with a liver complication; in each case the doctor urged an operation and the husband felt uncertain. Neither woman would make a decision until she heard from Dorothy Dix. In both cases Dorothy answered by special delivery: while she could hardly give medical advice, she thought anyone should listen to his doctor and do what he urged without delay.

A young man wrote, at his wife's suggestion. He had a serious

stomach disorder and the doctors said he might or might not survive surgery. The correspondent could not make up his mind. If it were God's will that he live, he suspected he would live. If not, he would die. . . . Dorothy sent a trenchant reply: How did he know it was God's will? God also helped those who did something about their diseases.

She added that if the young man felt so uncertain, let him at least hunt up his minister, or any minister, and put it up to him. She spurred him into action. The minister helped get him into the hospital, and the youth lived. A month later both the wife and the minister wrote to tell Miss Dix the good news.

Frequently women informed her that they respected her judgment and therefore wanted her guidance in money matters. They had several thousand dollars—often less—and would invest in any stock or bond she suggested. From her column they gathered that she knew men on the market and the heads of big companies; they promised not to mention any "tips" she gave.

To inquiries of this kind Dorothy replied that she could not take it upon herself to offer advice. Surely, however, the woman knew a banker who would counsel her; or, perhaps she should resort to the safety of government bonds. Or Miss Dix might point out the value of a paid-up insurance policy.

She wrote on the subject of insurance with such conviction that permission was asked to quote her in promotional advertising. She noted often, from her own observation, cases in which a policy would have meant salvation for a widow. Some of her Meriwether cousins had survived financially because their father had remembered to keep up his payments.

A woman in her late forties wrote that in a department store the previous week she had succumbed to an impulse she could not explain, and had taken a valuable purse. She did not dare go back with it; every time she saw it in her drawer she felt sick with guilt and shame. Miss Dix replied pragmatically. Get right down to the store with the thing wrapped in plain paper and enclosing a brief note of explanation, and leave it for the president of the company. He'd see that it went back to the proper person. And, then, let the

purse snatcher go home and promise herself never to try anything of the sort again.

She could laugh over other notes: "Dear Dorothy Dix, I stutter very badly. Shall I tell my boy friend about it?" Or, "Do girls with blue eyes or black eyes make the best wives?", or "I was born on the twenty-fifth of April and my wife on the nineteenth of November. Would you say we were congenial?"

About the same time arrived an inquiry from a dour youth who explained that he had taken his girl to dinner, then to the theater, and afterward to a place of dancing. Should he have kissed her when he told her good night?

"No," said Miss Dix. "I think you did enough for her."

Perhaps more than ever, she tried humor in coping with problems raised by upset wives. One matron thought sadly that her husband appreciated a good meal more than he appreciated her. When he kissed her it was merely a peck; when he looked at a steak it was like an infatuated lover staring at young Billie Burke.

For such women, said Miss Dix, her advice was simple. Let them "go on feeding their husbands steaks and forget their own yearning for mush." She added: "A well-fed man is an amiable one, and one easy to handle. Moreover, nothing ties a man to his own fireside so tightly as a heavy dinner that makes him as disinclined to go out and hunt adventure as a gorged snake. Men tire of beauties; they weary of wits. But a wife who is a crackerjack cook has a charm in her pots and pans that works perennially three times a day."

Her correspondence, she told an interviewer, was playing an ever more important part in her work: "As a matter of fact I get most of the suggestions for my articles from my correspondents; for human nature is pretty much the same everywhere and it is a safe guess that the problem troubling one man or woman is bothering many more."

She explained: "I keep pegging along, year after year, in the same old way—getting, I hope, a little stronger grip on my work, learning a little more craftsmanship and getting a little closer, I trust, to the hearts of my readers." More than a hundred papers, in addition to the six owned by Hearst, used her columns. "This gives me millions and millions to talk to every day, and it's a very solemn thing to

think about and makes me want to talk nothing but straight talk to them."

This was her typically unpretentious attitude toward "her public." As for pegging along, however, she exercised a right of understatement; by now she was earning more than \$35,000 a year. Her articles appeared steadily in Good Housekeeping, Cosmopolitan, and other magazines; collections of her columns came out in book form and editors went regularly to her with fresh offers.

Yet she could still discount her celebrity. Traveling near Atlanta, she and friends halted for directions at a tumble-down cabin, with a puny child in front of it. A woman's voice shrilled to the child: "If you don't get in this minute, I'll bus' your head wide open wid a brick, Dorothy Dix Giles!"

The original Dorothy smiled at her companion: "That's fame, you see."

Meanwhile, the woman suffrage movement caught her interest, and in 1914, 1915, and 1916 she was one of its enthusiastic advocates. On visits to New Orleans she joined causes with the crusading sisters, Kate and Jean Gordon, who fought for the vote, fairer wages for factory girls, and better care of tuberculars. In the North she became a friend of Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt. Years later, in the middle of an affectionate letter, Mrs. Catt wrote:

"My dear Dorothy Dix, how well I remember those days in the long ago when you—young, pretty, witty and charming—stood before our audiences and won them over to the old cause." (The "young" Dorothy was in her fifties, yet nobody denied her appeal as a speaker.) "I can see you standing up, with those witticisms pouring forth, as though it was but yesterday. . . . All the old suffragists of Louisiana, including the Gordons and even the grand-daughter of our one-time leader—brave soul that she was—are gone; but you are there to pass on the benedictions of the days gone by."

Dorothy served as one of two star speakers at a great suffrage jubilee in Boston, at which she accepted appointment as delegate to the International Women's Suffrage Convention in Stockholm. She still hoped for that deferred European trip, but, as usual, "important business at home" kept her from going. In February of 1914, meanwhile, she addressed the Woman's Political Union in

New York City and attacked a slogan popular with the opposition: "Who will take care of baby while mother votes?" Pointing out that voting took five minutes a year, Dorothy added that "a pa is as much a pa as a ma is a ma," meaning it would not hurt pa to mind baby occasionally and even cook a meal.

As for the objection that voting would "unfeminize the ladies," she noted that people had once thought a study of geography would "unsex a girl," while mathematics would destroy her ability as a homemaker, so that "the only way for a girl to earn a living is to marry it." While the ladies cheered she added the pronouncement: "The world has found it's trying to do business with half its capital." And she snapped at a pretty "anti" who had used an old argument—too many fools vote already. "My answer is that she won't have to vote!"

Early in 1915 Vera Morel of New Orleans called on her and was drafted into a pilgrimage to Rochester for the forty-sixth annual convention of the state suffrage party. On the morning of departure, a line of cars honked off from Washington Square, yellow bunting and pennants flying, with Dorothy "carefully tucked in her roomy machine and George Gilmer—like other suffragetical husbands—silently expressing his own approval of the cause by skillfully steering." Just how approxing George really was might have been an open question.

Miss Morel describes the way a few men waved their caps at them and women called out, daringly: "I'm with you!" At village after village the party stopped and talks were made. While others frowned, pounded fists, and shrilled opinions, Dorothy spoke "in her low, slow voice," with its Southern softness, and "absolutely convinced each conservative little town that only when we do attain feminism in its fullness will this world know true efficiency."

For years she had urged that women seeking fair play should make certain they performed their tasks as well as men did. Now she repeated that insistence, with feeling, in her columns and letters. Once a girl wrote her: "I am going to be a secretary and want you to recommend a book that will help me become a top-notch one." Dorothy replied: "I highly commend to you the unabridged dictionary."

But her interest in capable younger professional people of both sexes continued without change. It was at this time that she accepted an invitation to join a circle of young married couples—writers, artists, theater people—who formed a Dutch-treat group. Nearly all were in their twenties or early thirties, gifted people working hard, most of them certain of future accomplishment. She admitted that she preferred such people to stuffy celebrities who had already arrived. "They're more my kind," she said.

One winter the group decided to meet every Thursday for dinner at Rollino's—a basement restaurant with an entrance under a high brownstone stoop on West 9th Street. Dorothy liked Rollino, who was both the owner and the cook; she also enjoyed the Bohemian atmosphere, as well as Rollino's patrons, such as Madame Nordica and the young Italian singers from the Metropolitan, who would often put down their knives and forks and sing their hearts out. Dorothy, usually not too fond of music, said: "They make even me thrill. It never sounds so nice at the Met!"

At Rollino's she met Amelia Bingham, a leading actress of the hour, and her broker husband, Lloyd; Phoebe Snow, railroad-poster girl of the time; Mr. and Mrs. William Faversham, before their sensational divorce stirred the country; and many others.

More often she went to Rollino's for dinner with the younger friends of the Dutch-treat circle. Among them she could count James P. Howe, son of the philosopher-editor Ed Howe, who later won a place for himself as an Associated Press correspondent; Charles P. Everitt, the great authority on rare books; Christine Frederick, eventually a recognized writer for women; her husband, J. G. Frederick, who was to edit *Printers' Ink*; and the Stanley Arthurs of Louisiana.

Rollino's had camaraderie and an eight-course meal with red wine—for seventy-five cents a head! Dorothy laughed at the antics of her friends, and offered toasts and accepted them. "You'd never have known she wasn't the most obscure person in the lot," one man remembers.

Consciously or unconsciously, Dorothy was drawing material from those around her. From an evening at Rollino's came a story, delicately handled, about the wife of a theatrical celebrity, who fell to the floor, overwhelmed by high spirits and red wine. Twenty-four hours after the story was published, she was astonished at the response. In came dozens of letters from women who drank and could not stop, from mothers and fathers of girls who had become alcoholics, and husbands and friends of secret tipplers.

In those days a "lady" seldom dared—at least in print—to speak with anything except scorn and resentment of those caught by the bottle. Dorothy Dix had written with sympathy and understanding, and many told her that they had read her account with tears and clipped the column to be read and reread.

It was Dorothy who suggested in time that the Dutch-treat group should arrange to meet successively in the homes of members—with no frills, no appetizers, desserts, and the like, but a single dish, the hostess's specialty. Each woman in the group, being her own cook, had a particular dish which she had learned to prepare best, Dorothy explained. "So why not whittle down hospitality to meet income and energy? One fine, substantial course and a salad, perhaps; nothing more. Meal enough for anybody and not too much labor for the cook."

The plan went so well that Dorothy wrote about it several times in her columns, citing the venture as an example of good household management, and a pleasant way to have a good time with friends without too much expense. One of the hostesses with a German background provided a dish called "klops"—a glorified meat loaf of beef and pork with aromatic seasonings; the name was unromantic, the dish a great success. A young Louisiana matron provided a highly seasoned Creole gumbo of okra, shrimp, and crabs; on this particular dish Dorothy Dix pronounced a kind of benediction; it "tasted like heaven itself and yet made you think you'd swallowed a torchlight procession."

When her own turn for entertaining arrived she set Milly to making a crawfish bisque, although crawfish (in New Orleans, never crayfish) were a little-known New York delicacy of those days. When Dorothy inquired at her neighborhood market, the fish vendor puzzled over the word, then brightened: "Yah, maybe I know what iss. Kind of little lobsters, no?" He suggested the Fulton Fish Market, where, after an hour's search, she located

them. She laughed over the experience. In New Orleans she would have paid only fifteen cents for a large pailful of the lively "little lobsters"; up here they cost five cents a head, and she needed about a hundred for the bisque.

After a time the Dutch-treat group decided to try a plan for "eating around the world in New York"—dining at Greek, Russian, German, or Swiss restaurants. As members brought friends, and these friends asked to join and brought other friends, the circle had outgrown any private home, and bigger and bigger public eating places were needed. The Dutch-treaters continued to meet until World War I, when the men went into the army, to Washington, and to other jobs. Sadly Dorothy saw the group break up. "The only thing better than good food is good talk and good times to go with it," she said. For years afterward she spoke fondly of those dinners.

Rising war prices disturbed her frugal soul. "They charge us by the neighborhood," she told a friend. "Everybody around Riverside Drive is supposed to be a millionaire. So the butcher, baker, candlestick-maker and grocer charge us accordingly."

A friend who lived in the Bronx told her that prices were much lower there. So she got out her big touring car and drove from store to store in the Bronx, picking up bargains. She thought that she had found a way to beat the Riverside Drive dealers, but when she compared notes later with her friend, Dorothy discovered that on nearly every purchase she had paid double what he did. It was that car, she decided. "They saw me coming."

In the case of her friends Dorothy was quick to help out in financial crises, although this help was usually practical rather than monetary. She would write prompt letters of introduction, telephone friends, and make special trips to help someone locate a job. "Once I heard her do everything," reports a Southerner, "but cry over the phone to wangle a chance for a friend from Alabama. She kept saying, "Think of that child he has, and the other one on the way!" She must have worn down the city editor, for the man got the job."

On the other hand, Dorothy seldom gave cash gifts, except to particular charities in which she developed an informed interest. She felt that such presents weakened character, and that rewards were much greater if the recipient had made some attempt to earn the money.

"People find victory's fruits all the sweeter after the drudgery of winning them," she sometimes said. "You respect yourself more when you do your own achieving. Handouts don't strengthen friendships; they may end them."

When a wealthy friend died, a neighbor asked Dorothy Dix what the woman had left her. "A treasure," Dorothy answered. "A treasure of things I remember about her."

They All Talked to Her

eople marveled at the way the world talked to Dorothy Dix. "They all seemed glad to tell her things," said a staff member, "including people who sometimes shouldn't have done it. Whatever nobody else could get, little Dorothy got with a minimum of fuss and feathers. She appeared to be almost psychic, too, in the way she caught things that weren't said, that couldn't be said. With Miss Dix you just didn't have to say it. I'd guess, too, that she understood because she liked people."

She received as her next big assignment the all but impossible task of interviewing Hetty Green—the fantastic, half-mad multimillionaire "Witch of Wall Street," who distrusted the world, lived like an impoverished hermit, and once asked a laundry to starch only the bottom of her petticoat and charge her half price. Hetty ignored most people, refused to answer the doorbell, and scowled at the friendliest of questions. All this and more the editor knew, and yet he told Dorothy he wanted "a real story on Hetty, something intimate."

Dorothy decided to go to New Jersey and set up temporary living quarters in a miserable cold-water flat in the building where Hetty lived. It was poorly heated, badly ventilated, probably verminous. "No one would have stayed there except a poverty-stricken woman or Hetty herself," said Dorothy.

For days Dorothy listened to sounds through the wall, and for days she timed it so that she reached for her milk bottle just when Hetty reached for hers. ("Sometimes I didn't," she explained. "This couldn't look too obvious.") After a while Dorothy began to talk to Mrs. Green, at first very casually, as if she hardly cared whether Hetty answered or not. Slowly Mrs. Green responded to Dorothy's cheerfulness, grunting replies which were in themselves a tremendous concession.

A few days more and they were even exchanging sentences. Finally to Dorothy's own astonishment, the sour-tempered, psychopathic Hetty agreed to come next door for tea and gossip. At that point Dorothy identified herself. "I couldn't have cheated about such a thing," she explained. Hetty nodded and said she had guessed that Dorothy was probably a newspaper woman.

But Hetty Green liked Dorothy Dix, and she went to her flat and talked for hours. Would Mrs. Green mind if she took notes? Mrs. Green did not mind. As the words poured out, thousands on thousands of them, Dorothy realized that it must have been a long, long time since Hetty had confided in a friend, relative, or business associate. Shortly afterward the Journal had one of the fullest stories ever to appear on Mrs. Green. It was as intimate as the office had said it should be, and also sympathetic.

Thereafter when Dorothy met Hetty Green at intervals on the street, at her bank, or at the railroad station, onlookers gasped, for the old crone was actually smiling! Mrs. Green told Dorothy that most women shouldn't try to invest their own money. She believed it far safer for them to put their savings into the purchase of a good house. Dorothy Dix took Hetty Green's advice. Presently she would have her house and it would be a substantial one. She also made investments conservatively, shrewdly, with the help of her businessman brother, Ed.

Meanwhile she "rang the bell" again and again with her criminal

reporting. Toughened police reporters told, half in admiration, half in envy, how she broke a vice ring with an interview. After working months on the case, the district attorney's office was ready to give up. It could not link a certain central figure, a large-scale procurer, to a string of bawdyhouse operators. Then someone remembered that a faded little prostitute who was now under arrest had once been close to the procurer, and then thought of Miss Dix—the woman who supposedly could get anyone to talk.

Dorothy received a call from the district attorney's office, and went to the woman's cell. When she first introduced herself, the prisoner stiffened. But Dorothy said: "See here, I'm another woman, and I can understand some of your troubles. Why don't you tell me about them?" For nearly three hours they sat together—Dorothy listening, the woman crying and talking. The next day the police had all or nearly all the information they needed to crack the case.

The prisoner went free, and Dorothy and the district attorney helped her find a job in another city. Later she wrote to say she was grateful to Dorothy Dix for saving her life. "Another few months and I'd have killed myself."

Her interview with Grand Duke Cyril of Russia taught Dorothy something about European, or at least Russian aristocracy. Sending her card with a request for a meeting, she was surprised when his secretary immediately made an appointment. Then she reflected: the name Dorothy Dix had a piquant sound, and the Grand Duke was understood to be a gay dog with beautiful ladies. The Grand Duke was due for a disappointment, she announced in advance.

At the Duke's hotel she was again surprised. The secretary questioned her, led her into the suite, spoke to someone in Russian, and out stepped a pair of oversized bodyguards. The two men assumed places on either side of her, watching intently as she questioned the Grand Duke, following every motion of her pencil, and almost holding their breaths every time she took her handkerchief from her purse to touch her lips. "They were close enough to grab me without moving a step!"

Later she met a friend—a Department of Justice man assigned to help protect the Russian noble—and told him about the peculiar

interview. Surely the Grand Duke wasn't afraid of being compromised by her? Her friend grinned: "You were carrying that black bag under your arm? Then, of course, they were afraid you had a gun or even a small bomb in it!" She was amazed. Would anybody in Tennessee ever dream that Lizzie Meriwether could be suspected of wanting to murder a grand duke?

For her interviews she generally prepared an angle in advance. The unsatisfied hopes of even phenomenally successful people intrigued her, and frequently she worked around to this aspect of their lives. Anna Held acknowledged that her life was "blighted" because she could not do the thing she wanted most—excel in serious dramatic parts. Anna yearned to become a Bernhardt. Instead, she was famous because she rolled her eyes at the men and laughed with the audience. "Still, nobody could say she didn't do that very well." To Miss Held, Dorothy tactfully offered the same kind of advice she passed on to her letter writers: Be satisfied with what you have.

Her curiosity about Arnold Bennett's unrealized dreams netted her another interview that fellow newspapermen said could not be obtained. Bennett turned out to be icily unresponsive, a difficult man at best. Dorothy's friend, Irvin Cobb, tried to interview him, then Will Irwin. "When I heard those two masters had given up, I felt worried," she said. "Still, they weren't women, and a woman can sometimes swing an interview simply because she is a woman."

She found Bennett extremely formal—either very shy or very withdrawn. She got nowhere until she pointed her pencil at him: "Mr. Bennett, I've always been sorry for you because of your—your blighted ambition."

"What?" She had startled him. "How's my life blighted?"

"You've always wanted to run a hotel."

Bennett's eyebrows shot up. "Why . . . as a matter of fact, Miss Dix, I have. But how the devil did you find that out?"

"You told me so, in your books." Her smile widened. "Every time one of your characters comes a cropper, he keeps a hotel. It happens over and over."

Arnold Bennett shook his head in astonishment. "By George, I

never quite realized it. You're right." The ice suddenly thawed, "and we had a lovely time," Dorothy said. Also, she got a striking interview.

One Fourth of July, an emergency assignment sent her "with no notice at all" into one of the most physically harrowing experiences of her life. She had gone to Philadelphia for a hotel garden party. "I wore a beautiful new light summer silk dress and a hat covered with gauzy flowers. I just liked myself, all dressed up in my best and flimsiest."

As always the paper knew where to find her, and sent a message to her at the luncheon. There had been a disastrous gas explosion in the mines near Johnstown; a train would leave in about twenty minutes, and the office expected her to be on it. She had no time even to change.

Her flounces drifting around her, she arrived at Johnstown. When she appealed for transportation, several drivers looked dubiously at her costume. Nevertheless one agreed to take her out to the mine. As she reached the entrance with no protection in the way of coat or umbrella, it began to pour and she was soon soaked to the skin.

"I felt and looked like a beaten-up peacock—or is the word peahen?" she said later. Yet she had to stay for more than a week at the scene of the tragedy, with only an hour or two at a time for restless sleep in a near-by hut. Day and night she must keep vigil over an agonizing story.

Perched on a pile of slag, she stared at the ominously silent mine entrance, as men dug far below. Near her were weeping women, wives of the victims still inside—"heavy, shapeless bodies, shawled and roughly clad, with thick ankles and thick wrists and scarred hands and disheveled hair." And there stood Dorothy in her ridiculous clothes—wilted silk and hat ringed with drooping flowers. "I felt ashamed, so out of place, but I couldn't leave."

The mine women sensed Dorothy Dix's compassion and spoke to her, as women always did, telling of their husbands and of their children at home, who also awaited the tragic word they all feared. Dorothy took her place beside these women as the mine cars came up, loaded with limp bodies—all dead. She caught some of the women as they collapsed.

"Every load that arrived seemed just an indistinguishable mass of bodies to me. But those women knew . . ." She remained for another day, and for the mass burial service in a crude church. As she talked of the episode later, her eyes clouded: "Those rows on rows of cheap, flimsy coffins, and those women who could only cry . . ."

At the end she felt exhausted and depressed. After the ceremony, she met a young New York newspaperman, a newcomer, who said to her: "I think we need a drink, don't we?"

Dorothy thought that might help; she might even take "two drinks, or a dozen of them." The young man "led me into a drug-store and bought me an ice-cream soda!"

Earnestly, wisely, she appraised motives, conflicting evidence, and personalities in each criminal case on which she worked. Now and then she made up her mind that the accused man or woman was guilty, and held steadily to that opinion. Sometimes, no matter what her more hard-boiled associates insisted, she was a long time arriving at a conclusion.

"People forgot cases in which I saw guilt and remembered the others in which I didn't, and so they called me a sob sister," she recalled regretfully. "But my feminine hunches were good at least to this extent. No man or woman that I believed innocent was ever convicted."

Her entire career as a reporter might have been summed up in an experience about which she told in later days. The city editor assigned her to talk to a man who was famous for his gruff behavior—a crusty quality best described as "plain meanness." When she came back to the office after the interview, she noticed that the man on the city desk looked up at her in surprise. She was smiling, and this obviously puzzled him.

"Why?" Dorothy asked. "He turned out to be a right nice man. I don't see why people say those things about him."

The city editor looked at the quiet, almost birdlike woman before him, and then by accident drew on the same figure that Major

Burbank had used in describing her a quarter century earlier: "Well, Miss Dix, not many men would have enough nerve to brain a canary."

Already the canary was beating out her story. . . .

CHAPTER 16

"The Next Murder . . . Will Be Yours"

he cold months of 1915–16 were, Dorothy Dix said, the winter of her discontent. Until then she had enjoyed her life in New York, or most of it—her broadening friendships, praise from those whose judgment she respected, a sense of accomplishment. George's moodiness had lessened. Some of his physical troubles returned, but even so she was less worried about his health. At this time Dorothy had told an interviewer she believed her greatest accomplishments lay ahead.

Then, all at once, she found herself steadily more oppressed, beaten down by the volume of work that she had formerly managed to carry, and unnerved by small matters. Why? "I thought a while, and then I understood," she explained. "It was those trials, murders and poisonings and assorted irregularities. I had been glad to do them, but now I had gotten more and more interested in those letters from readers, and more and more concerned with them."

She had become terribly bored with the "calls to violence," as she described them. By now she thought she knew every small town in

the New Jersey environs of New York, having visited them in covering husband- or wife-killing cases. She agreed with the man who cynically called it "the married-murder belt." She felt that she would be able to do a great deal more good with her letters and columns than by chasing across the country in search of homicide.

"There's such a thing as too much of almost anything, even blood for a newspaperman. I found I was going around thinking of killings, rehearsing cross-examinations. Finally I went to Mr. Brisbane and told him I wanted to continue working for the organization, with no cadavers attached. He looked at me as if I were joking, and I added: "The next murder I cover will be yours!" Mr. Brisbane still said nothing.

A few weeks later she fell sick, and she assured friends it happened "without any effort or connivance on my part." The accumulated pressure of her work had left her close to exhaustion; she had trouble in sleeping, and she had to rest for several weeks. When the doctor examined her again she was somewhat better; nevertheless he lectured her: "If you keep up this kind of schedule, Mrs. Gilmer, you won't be alive in another year."

Shaken and convinced, she returned to the office, only to find another murder case confronting her. One of the city-desk men explained: "Don't you see, Dorothy? With us you're as much an expert in crime as you are in advice. We want both. And you're under contract, you remember."

Dorothy Dix remembered, and she also remembered the date at the top of her contract. It expired at the end of the year, and a commitment of renewal would have to come several months before that. She drew a circle on the calendar around the earlier date.

It was at this opportune time that the Wheeler Newspaper Syndicate people approached her with an extremely attractive proposition. They wanted her to go over to their syndicate with a column of advice, and nothing else. The syndicate was sure it could handle her to fine advantage, and find her an even greater audience.

If she accepted this offer she would have only columns to write and would have plenty of time to answer those letters. Furthermore if she gave up homicides, she need not stay in New York. She could return in time to New Orleans, the town she loved so much, to live in the gentler atmosphere of the river city. Down there crepe myrtles would be hanging their foamy blossoms along the walks, and the sleek gray mockingbirds would already be nest-building among the bushes.

In New Orleans, too, she could be with Brother Ed, and Pa Meriwether could visit her more often. For George, too, life would be less harried. She had begun to think of a house in the greengrown Garden District or near the curving passage of upper St. Charles Avenue. She might even travel at last; it had been so long since she had even planned a trip. . . .

Yet she had to take other factors into account. "Behind me were sixteen years in one office—the office that had given me my first big chance in the Carrie Nation days, and my baptism in New Jersey's domestic affairs. I'd worked with some of the best editors in the world, and fitted my ways to theirs. I was fifty-five, hardly the age to start a new job, a new career. I didn't know what to do."

So for weeks she hesitated.

A friend who was in New York at this time of her indecision came to visit her late one afternoon. A storm had broken over Manhattan, and Dorothy Dix was standing at the window of the apartment with her profile to him, hands clutching the chair beside her. Far below, the Hudson was lashed into white caps. To her friend's astonishment Dorothy remained engrossed, nostrils dilating, eyes taking in every detail before her. Was she caught by an inward storm of her own, or was she finding a kind of satisfaction in watching the war of the elements?

At length she turned away from the window and faced him. She was calm again, and they spoke of the recent syndicate offer. The Wheeler organization had restated its offer, adding a salary increase and a provision that she was to write three columns a week instead of six.

Still, out of loyalty, she went to the Journal management, and suggested that if they met the Wheeler offer she would remain. But, as she had said before, there must be no murder trials to cover. The Journal considered the proposal, and Dorothy again watched the calendar and continued with her columns and letters. At least

she had better clerical assistance now and need no longer fume at untrained stenographers. She retained a secretary, Belle, of whom she had become fond. Belle arrived daily at nine, to work until noon, taking down Miss Dix's columns and then scores of answers to letters.

The letters came in steadily from all over the country and Dorothy read them in the afternoon, in the evening, and in the early morning. By the time Belle arrived each morning, Dorothy had many of her replies well planned. She still wrote an occasional answer by hand and mailed it at the nearest post office. Sometimes she watched Milly's pots while her cook scurried down with a special-delivery message for a girl in Shreveport or Tulsa, a New Jersey town or the Bronx.

The Journal management dawdled over the matter of a new contract. Some journalists would have stormed and demanded a showdown, and had Dorothy been more aggressive, a few old-timers say, she might have won everything she asked. But that was not her way.

The year 1916 approached an end and still she had received no formal notification from the Journal, but she continued her usual work until the day arrived on which her old contract expired. That afternoon she went to the home of her friends the Inslees. "If they send no word by midnight it's settled," she told them. Mrs. Inslee recalled that Dorothy exhibited both apprehension and uncertainty.

At midnight she called her apartment and learned that no message had arrived. "Well, I'm free," she said, and turned to Mrs. Inslee, unhappily.

The next day she signed the Wheeler Syndicate's contract. Then she heard from Arthur Brisbane. He was astonished and hurt, and hinted that he and the organization deserved better of Miss Dix. Miss Dix answered that she, too, felt upset, but she had given them every opportunity to sign her again; and now the matter was settled.

Though everybody shook hands, some hard feelings remained at the *Journal*. For a time Brisbane tried to develop a "second Dorothy Dix." At intervals he supposedly turned out a few columns as samples to be followed by apprentices, much as he had done with a number of Beatrice Fairfax columns at another time. None of his efforts was successful.

Brisbane soon recovered. Only a few years later he hailed Dorothy again as the greatest living reporter; whenever they met he greeted her with a compliment and a smile. "Nevertheless," she confided to two friends, "his manner always implied I'd have gone a lot farther had I stuck with him!"

Part Three

I don't deserve all this, but I was never one of those misguided females that clamor for justice.

Dorothy Dix

Roses—and a Handful of Thorns

January 14, 1917. At 2 P.M. George and I started forth on the great adventure that I have planned so long. By such prosaic means as a taxicab and the Grand Central, we set out on a journey that is to take me—I hope—to far countries and strange scenes that have been the country of my dreams since childhood, for always have I heard the East a-calling . . . Dorothy Dix

n a series of notebooks Dorothy set down details of the jaunt to the Far East that had been her dream for years. She had finished arrangements, happily, with the new syndicate, and with the help of the good secretary Belle she had written several months of columns in advance. With a clear conscience she could follow the doctor's orders to rest, to think of nothing that had to do with deadlines. Already more than seventy-five papers had subscribed to the column under its new management, and the Wheeler Syndicate assured her that more would be taking the service every month.

When her old New Orleans paper sent word that it wanted Dorothy Dix as a feature, she was delighted. The *Picayune*, now the *Times-Picayune*, was welcoming her back. Mr. Rapier had given way to Leonard and Yorke Nicholson, the young men whose curls she had once helped remove. "The day I heard that," Dorothy smiled, "I slept happier. I'd come home."

And now her work was to be forgotten while she traveled with George to the Far East. But with every line she wrote in her notebooks and to friends she showed she could not leave behind her interest in people. Riding with George over the plains of the Middle West, she saw "miles and miles of prairies with no trees except bunches about the houses. How the pioneer women in those dreary little houses must have dreamed of the waving branches of the forests back home. It made my throat ache to think of it."

In San Francisco the Chinese section looked all too sanitary and "dull compared to the thrilling inner view I had of the New York Chinatown when I was writing the story of the murder of Elsie Sigel."

World War I continued, and friends assured Dorothy and George that they might be torpedoed by U-boats. She was bothered more by seasickness than by U-boats. "Nature never designed me for a home on the ocean waves. At sea I always wish I were dead."

Gradually, however, she improved, and as the boat plowed westward across the Pacific she surrendered herself to the relaxation of the trip. "Another day of blissful rest and doing nothing but just soak in the warm tropic atmosphere," she said in a letter. She sat out on deck until midnight in air like midsummer; and of such evenings she wrote:

I can think of nothing so unutterably beautiful as these tropical nights, when the sky seems to close in around you like soft black velvet and the stars are close enough to touch, almost; and the ship slips noiselessly through the water like a phantom thing—and you wish you were sweet and twenty and had had somebody to make love to you behind the smokestacks. . . .

Involved in full-scale war with Germany, the British had closed India to pleasure travel. However, Dorothy and George spent weeks in Japan, Java, and China, and there Dorothy came fully into her own. Letters home described mountain towns built on many tiers, the pealing of temple bells, the lure of jade and dark, carved woods, and the smell of spices. The trip gave a definite pattern to Dorothy's life; from then on, whenever she could leave her work, she returned to the East.

"If I believed in reincarnation at all, I'd think I used to be an Oriental," she once exclaimed. She brought home teakwood cabi-

nets, embroidered wall hangings, quantities of jade and figurines. On the occasions when, for a few friends, she donned a rich red or green kimono and bright sandals, she had the look of a graying Buddha. Or, as one man said, she looked "like somebody's Chinese aunt, with a twinkling eye that no Buddha ever had."

In her case the doctor's prescription had worked brilliantly, and she felt better than she had in years. For George Gilmer, unfortunately, the trip meant only an accentuation of annoyances. Nothing went right; or if, by some chance, it did, he was still annoyed. He fretted, he argued, he sat alone on decks or in trains.

Toward the trip's end George's physical health suddenly became much worse, and he spent weeks in bed on shore or on ship, nursing arthritic pains, pains in the back, and his own fury against fate. Philosophically, Dorothy stayed at his side; she had had enough of pleasure from her travels to last her for the time being. When they arrived in the United States, she took him to New York, where she summoned doctors, much against his wishes. For the next nine months George continued ill—now listless on his back, now limping bitterly through the Riverside Drive apartment.

Working steadily at home, Dorothy found herself better able to look after him. The new regime under the Wheeler Syndicate called for no more days and half-days at the office, no trips out of town. She would turn from four or five hours of dictating letters and planning new columns to the harder task of placating a husband who thought she "ignored" him and who resented the demands of her writing. George's melancholia had reached such a stage that she seldom had visitors in the evening. "I just didn't know how George would take it," she confided to a friend.

At the same time, she knew the satisfaction of continuing achievement. As the syndicate had predicted, more papers came into the fold and subscribed to the service. With more time to concentrate on the columns, and fewer to do, she could give her words of advice longer study, and her work showed the result. Letters from her readers increased.

In a concrete way, she saw evidences of the growing appeal of the counsel she offered. She was startled to discover notes from industrialists whose names appeared on the front pages of news-

papers. The rector of a metropolitan church asked her opinion about ways to cope with his teen-age daughter. Other ministers, she learned, used her columns as themes for sermons, and one devoted five successive pulpit talks to her discussions on marriage.

Sometimes both husband and wife would write to Dorothy Dix, saying that they had had a serious difference of views and, after long argument, had agreed to consult her, promising one another solemnly to follow Miss Dix's decision. Occasionally they wrote later to tell her how well her advice had worked. In addition several doctors advised Miss Dix that they were giving a number of their neurotic patients copies of her column rather than pills or pale liquids.

Surprisingly often she received a special kind of appeal from husbands and wives who differed over the place in which they would be buried. Typical was the letter from a man in Indiana:

My wife and I are now forty-eight and have been planning a little as to where we want to be buried in case we suddenly drop off. The wife, for personal reasons, wants to be buried in her family lot, and I for personal reasons wish to be buried five miles away in a beautiful mausoleum. She absolutely refuses to be put there, and I cannot see my way clear to being buried in her family lot. I agreed to compromise and be buried with her in a neutral cemetery, but this she will not agree to.

Now, should I forfeit my own wishes and be buried by her side in her lot, or would it be all right to be buried separately? What would people think and say about it?

Dorothy thought carefully and then wrote:

I do not see what difference it makes where your ashes mingle so long as you are together in death as in life. With so many things to disagree about in marriage it seems to me a matter of small consequence to make an issue of a burial place. Inasmuch as you have no tomb of your own, I think she is right in wishing to be placed in her family's plot. It would be kinder and wiser of you to accede to her wishes than to be buried separately. That is likely to cause comment and give people the wrong impression. Death is so final. Why carry on differences beyond the grave?

In her own marriage Dorothy Dix had more pressing problems than disputes over a burial place for herself and George. All at once her husband became seriously sick again. She had deferred her return to New Orleans until matters clarified and her syndicate work would permit her to go. Now, at a time when summer heat would be stifling in Louisiana, she had to take George to a cool resort, and the doctor recommended Saratoga Springs. Her friendly relative "Skipper" Meriwether, came to her aid. As she wrote Mrs. Inslee from Saratoga:

Walter proved to be a jewel. He fairly lifted George from one train to the other, and continues to hover over him like a mother over a sick baby. He takes G. out in the park in his wheel chair every morning, where they sit for hours in the sun while I do my work. . . . At night Walter rubs G. with some evil-smelling liniment. It appears that in some previous incarnation he was connected with a race-horse station, and this liniment was used with great effect on the stringhalted horses—G. being affected with the same complaint.

George is marvelously improved but is still very helpless. I live in terror of his breaking his leg, as he will persist in trying to walk and stand alone, and he has had several bad falls. G. is interested in the people and has told them over and over about Japan, until I am sure they stand in as much terror of the Yellow Peril as even a Californian could. But self-preservation is the first law of nature—even in conversation—and it is so much easier to take care of G. here than in that little apartment where we literally had the solitude of two.

A month later Dorothy noted that "my invalid is about the same." Though he appeared to "get more use of himself," he looked "very weak and nervous and melancholy," complained of back pains, and was "generally full of misery," in the southern parlance. She looked with dread toward the coming of winter. . . .

When the cold returned and they went back to New York, Dorothy found she had been right in dreading the winter. The next months produced the worst domestic crisis of her life. George was better physically, but mentally he became steadily worse, falling into black moods and raging tempers. Nothing in earlier years had prepared his wife for these terrible days.

Her New York intimates remember how they urged her to get a divorce. "I'll never do it," she frowned. "I took a vow, and I'm going to keep it. Besides, I'm supposed to advise others with troubles. How would it look for me to do a thing like that?" Then usually she would add: "How could he take care of himself without me?" When these friends suggested that at least she stay with them during George's most difficult attacks, she still declined: "I'll never leave. Something in me wouldn't let me do it."

Nevertheless Dorothy's position became steadily more untenable. It was of this period that she wrote a relative, telling the younger man she rejoiced that he had managed to be happy "under creditable circumstances" like Mr. Micawber in Dickens' story:

You can make everything in life better or worse by the way you take it. I have always held to that thought, and it has been a life preserver. When I was going through hell with George, I used to say—Well, plenty of other women have got devils for husbands and nothing good on the other side, and I've got a fine job, a good home, my beloved family and know lots of interesting people. So I'll just forget the misery and concentrate on my blessings.

Then happened the break with George that she had tried for decades to avoid. In a fury of anger and accusation, he left the apartment and did not return. Attempts to reach him failed, and when next she heard he had started South, and one source said he meant to stay in Florida. Months passed while she wondered whether George would return or not, and under what circumstances.

"We had seen it, or something like it, coming," said a New York friend. "I think she had, too. Now we tried to tell her she was fortunate the matter had turned out like this; she was free at last. She would look at us and say nothing, just stare in a sad, sick way. We almost felt she blamed herself, though nobody ever did more to make a marriage work." Her own health suffered again, and doctors recommended another ocean journey.

When Dorothy applied for a passport she was told that "it was not desired that people should take pleasure trips until shipping facilities were more normal." For a time, tense and anxious, she stayed in New York, then tried a rest at a Kentucky watering place.

She was hurt and disillusioned, and she had to face questions about her future. Her syndicate contract called for renewals every few years, at higher rates, and the Wheeler management pressed her to sign a new agreement. At the same time she had a further cause for self-congratulation, if she wanted it. The Hearst organization sent word that it hoped she would come back and "name her own price." It would meet almost any figure.

Dorothy puzzled listlessly over a decision. "Between hard work and the hell of being with George for years, I was all in, spent, dead on my feet." Then one day she spied an advertisement from a travel agency—"the first trip around the world after the war." Putting on her hat, she rushed out to buy one of the first tickets to be sold. Before she embarked she filed several scores of columns to run while she was gone.

On the trip "I was so interested in all the strange things I saw and did that I forgot my troubles. . . . When I got back I was a made-over woman. I put in more than thirty years of hard work, and I'm still doing it. . . . Believe me, change is the greatest miracle-worker in the world." Back in New York, almost buoyant, the "made-over" Dorothy informed the syndicate that she would go on with her work. She called for the letters that had accumulated, piled them in a trunk, and headed for New Orleans. From then on, she would make her home there.

Soon she was embracing Brother Ed again, and Pa Meriwether, who was whooping with joy over her return. For a while she had to catch up with family affairs—her sister-in-law, Daisy, and her teen-age nephews. Basking in Meriwether affection, she could forget everything and everyone else. She acquired a new house, a big place with airy rooms and wide hallways, at 1225 General Pershing Street—a short distance from St. Charles Avenue—in the verdant uptown section. As she wrote Helen Pitkin Schertz, her old newspaper friend, she had come back "with intent to stay."

Old Will Douglas Meriwether was now in his eighties. Lean, bright-eyed, and brisk, Pa Meriwether became ever more benevo-

lent toward the world, ever more absorbed in his family and particularly in his daughter Lizzie. Even in the mid-1920s he talked of assembling a batch of Meriwethers, including Dorothy, of course, and riding down the Mississippi on a houseboat! Pa would have been captain.

To Dorothy and others he gave generous gifts—sometimes beyond his means. But in minor ways he inclined to the traditional Scotch trait of closeness. He spent large sums driving from town to town to see his relatives, or he would take a taxi for long distances; yet he railed against the use of air-mail and special-delivery stamps.

Economy also underlay Pa's latter-day smoking habits. At seventy-six he had gone to a doctor who told him the cigars which he had always smoked might be affecting his heart. Rigorously Pa denied every inclination to touch a cigar—after a lifetime of smoking, no mean feat of will. Instead of finding his heart action improved, however, he grew nervous and was worse off than before. Then, a more reasonable specialist told Pa he might live to be a hundred; and if smoking gave him any satisfaction, why not do it? His daughter Dorothy agreed.

Will Douglas then turned to cigarettes. "They're just the modern way of absorbing the stuff," he said; and hadn't he always liked everything modern? He consumed at least a package a day, seven days a week, for the rest of his ninety-three years. He would walk blocks to a place that sold the harsher, less expensive brands. He watched the papers for sales, which he frequently patronized in order to save several cents on what he called "cartoons" of cigarettes.

To Pa Meriwether—so his daughter noted—smoking cigarettes meant really smoking them, not merely taking a few puffs and tamping out the rest. He used a cigarette until it usually burned down into the holder. In his cigarette case Pa carried tweezers, and spent a fair part of each day pulling smoldering fragments from his well-charred holder. Nobody knew, Dorothy said, how he kept from setting fire to himself during such operations.

In June, July, and August, Will Douglas Meriwether preferred the Diamond Springs hotel, in the cool hills of Kentucky. There he assembled friends, cousins, nieces, and nephews—sometimes daughters Dorothy and Mary—taking a place of honor on the porches or under the beech trees. He continued to play a breezy bridge game, though eventually he could barely make out the marks on the cards. Even then, despite Dorothy's protests, he sometimes insisted on a game.

One of the delights of his life was the annual formal gathering of the clan that took place during these later years, largely through his insistence and encouragement, at Dunbar's Cave in Tennessee. For this "Meriwether-Barker-Ferguson Family Reunion" he worked on the arrangements for months in advance with his son Ed and others. Cards went out by the thousands, and sometimes a surprising number of the clan appeared—four hundred or more. Nearly always Dorothy Dix attended. Not only did she like the gatherings, but "Pa wanted it, and so of course I went."

"And such a day it would be," said her nephew, Huntington Patch. Before daylight, surreys, buggies, farm wagons, and automobiles rolled out of near-by farms, towns, and cities, while trains brought other relatives. From Clarksville, Hopkinsville, Guthrie, Bowling Green, Trenton, Nashville, and from greater distances—New Orleans, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, Louisville—they came. Men, women, children, babies in arms. "Every time I went," Dorothy Dix recalled, "I found a new relative I'd never heard of."

There would be present, too, a dwindling line of ancient, dark-skinned "Mammies" of Civil War days, turbaned or bandannaed, barely able to walk yet alive to most of what went on around them. Sitting back, smoking pipes, they received their own tributes as countless Meriwethers called to shake hands and wish them well.

The food, as Dorothy described it, was memorable. A barbecue pit occupied the central place, prepared well ahead of time. Trenches were filled with hickory wood, and before midday a pungent aroma arose as prime carcasses of fattened hogs and lambs roasted, while helpers basted the meat with rich seasonings. "No meat ever tasted so good," Dorothy thought.

The cave at which the reunion was held is a natural phenomenon, its great mouth set in a rock formation, the polished pavilion floor sheltered from sun and rain, and always cool. In the jaws of

Dunbar's Cave any summer day was pleasant. Behind the entrance extended a twisting passage that Dorothy recalled from earlier visits; but few reunion guests tried it, for this was an occasion of Sunday-best white ducks and flannels and starched ruffles.

While uncles and aunts gossiped or "just rested" after ponderous meals, younger cousins danced to home-talent bands. Newcomers, recently married to Meriwethers, found it a strenuous initiation. Dorothy seldom had a chance to sit down, for she had to go from group to group. She was the most famous Meriwether on earth, and her remarks would be quoted for months. She must shake hands with palsied great-aunts, who told her—tearfully and accurately—that they would not greet her again; she must hold the newest babies. Pa Meriwether watched it all in shining pride.

CHAPTER 18

Memories Harsh, and Also Happy

n the next few years the total number of papers using Miss Dix's column, and the volume of letters from her readers, increased over and over again. In 1923, while she was on another trip, several rival syndicates competed in trying to sign her up. After some hesitation, she shifted from the Wheeler to the Ledger syndicate, and began a new phase of her career.

She wondered often about George Gilmer—how he was, where, and with whom. Members of his family learned he had gone to a small Florida community, to live in semiretirement. He received regular payments from his interest in the turpentine plant, and Dorothy was reassured about him . . . George was all right; he was getting along quietly; and he had no wish to return to her.

In fact, she discovered, George was still more bitter toward her. He blamed her for his troubles, for his failure to achieve higher status as an inventor. He spoke of her family's "hostility," and said they had "turned her from him." Still, she told herself, that part of her life had ended.

Dorothy Dix had become a name known in every American town and village, and she would soon be earning more than \$50,000 a year. Neither she nor anyone connected with her had reason to suspect that greater wealth and prestige lay ahead.

Perhaps her popularity increased still more because for the first time in her career an enterprising organization went to work to let America know what Miss Dix had to offer. Or perhaps it happened because in the day of the speak-easy, bathtub gin, and flappers the country felt a need for a certain affirmation, and turned—without understanding why—to her brand of practical advice.

In any case, by the mid-1920s, Dorothy Dix, sometimes to her own embarrassment, found herself much in the limelight. As she walked by a music store on New Orleans' Canal Street, a gramophone shrieked the silly new song with her name in it. On Broadway, Will Rogers shifted from jokes about Coolidge to remarks about "Dear Miss Dix." In Chicago and San Francisco and Boston, trucks rolled through the streets with great signs advertising her column.

Dorothy herself first saw the change when, discussing her columns by telephone to New York, she heard one of the executives of her syndicate casually say, "Oh, no, Miss Dix, I'll come down there, by tonight's train. I'd like to come." Nothing like that had ever happened to her before.

The year 1925 brought the dubious tribute of a fraudulent Dorothy Dix, who popped up in a southern city with a smiling announcement of her identity, and eleven children. Then a woman in New York sallied into a Fifth Avenue dress shop, declared she was the columnist, and charged a lot of satin dresses to Dorothy. In Australia, another impostor ran up bills in her name totaling more than a thousand dollars—including one for a pair of white kid boots with fur trimming. The latter item, Dorothy commented, offended her particularly; the lady's feet were so much bigger than hers.

Only now did she begin to sense the force she had become in molding American customs and morals. She not only reflected national opinion in what she said, but in her own fashion she was forming that opinion. When she was called "America's dean of women," a regular male reader wrote her: "And you can add a lot of men to that, too, Miss Dix!"

More meaningful for Dorothy Dix, in a direct and personal fashion, was an honor she received in her own New Orleans. The Times-Picayune chose her as a member of its board of directors. As she said proudly, she became the first "working newspaperman" still practicing the craft to take such a place on the paper. Delightedly she told a friend, "This makes up for a lot of things." She took her board duties seriously and frequently spoke up for the reporters and others of the active staff.

The times were changing, and Dorothy found herself changing with them. The car had become a social force, altering behavior patterns. "Necking" became a term in national use, if not quite a national pastime; and whether or not youth acted precisely like John Held, Jr.'s lacquered, shingled girl in a low-waisted, boxlike dress and the "jelly bean" with bell-bottomed trousers, and trombone in hand, much of America thought it did.

A saucy girl corrected one of Dorothy's remarks about the risks in necking. Miss 1924–25 put Dorothy straight: "You seem to be confusing your terms. Necking is from the neck up, and that's not dangerous at all. Petting—now, that's from the neck down and, Miss Dix, you might be right there!" Gravely Dorothy wrote her young adviser that she would try never to make this mistake again.

When Judge Ben Lindsey's revolutionary recommendation of "companionate marriage" was the topic of the day, Dorothy Dix spoke bluntly: "To my mind, free love means exactly what it says. And that's really nothing new."

These and other observations brought swift reactions from pleased readers. One girl who was a typical example of those who worked hard to attract men but without success wrote that nobody asked her "to step out with him of an evening." She was a young businesswoman, she did not make a good salary, and she felt deeply discouraged with the whole marriage outlook.

"My advice to a girl in this situation—and there are millions of her—is to forget men," said Miss Dix, flatly, directly. "Renounce romance. Just accept the fact that nature did not put you in the vamp class, and play your game of life from that angle." Though this might be a bitter pill, she noted, it would be good medicine for many.

"Why certain women are magnets that draw every man they meet, and why nothing in trousers except upon compulsion ever goes near other women just as good-looking, just as charming in every way, is one of the mysteries nobody has ever solved. . . . The fast steamship, the lightning express, the aeroplane, have annihilated distance, but human ingenuity has failed to invent any device to make a boy go to see the girl next door if he doesn't want to go."

Instead, she went on, let such a young woman put the same interest into her work and she would get quick results. "If she tried as hard to sell herself to her job as she does to sell herself socially," she would soon have a fine position as a well-paid secretary, buyer, or department manager.

Yet all the letters weren't answered so seriously. Occasionally Dorothy's sense of humor got the upper hand. There was, for example, that solemn note from a woman in her thirties, who searched her soul for a solution to her problem. She would soon be married, but, oh, should she first tell her fiancé that she had false teeth?

Dorothy cut through the verbal embroidery. "Marry him," she advised, "and keep your mouth shut."

Overnight the problem of George Gilmer revived. His New Orleans relatives received word that George had fallen into trouble in Florida, quarreled with a neighbor, and then made serious threats. One of the Gilmers went to Florida, and reported finding George in a poor state, physically and emotionally. There seemed only one thing to do, the humane thing—bring him to stay with his family. And so the sick man was taken to New Orleans.

Dorothy Dix admitted that this news came to her as a shock. Word of George's increasing hostility unnerved her. She learned that he was telephoning her friends, asking what she was saying "against" him.

His physical health grew better, but his mental condition did not. What could be done? George himself solved the dilemma for a time. He left New Orleans and was away for months; and then once more there arrived news that he was returning with grim accusations and, perhaps, intentions. This time his family acted for George's own good and protection.

His relatives met the train with a car. George got in peacefully enough and resisted only when he realized the automobile was taking him to a sanatorium. It was a difficult and unpleasant business. Yet there was no better solution.

That night Dorothy was depressed again. She was remembering George Gilmer—the George she first knew, a good-looking man, who showed a flattering interest in the young Lizzie. Then she saw the tragic George with whom she had put up for years. . . . Her friends reasoned with her, and eventually she put the tragedy out of her mind. But the memory of George would come back again and again to haunt her.

It was fortunate that she had a successful career to fall back on. The newspapers wanted more of Miss Dix, in fact double what they were getting. The syndicate urged her please to give them, not three, but six columns a week. She hesitated, and then reluctantly agreed, fitting herself to the new schedule without difficulty. The "reserve" within her had responded to her call.

At last the woman and her work appeared to merge. Her columns and the letters had become her life; from this time until the end of her career, they grew ever closer until they were almost identical. A younger friend said: "I'd sit there with her, and then suddenly I'd realize I was talking to an institution."

In spite of evidences of her greater national popularity, those around her thought that Dorothy Dix had little real conception of her increasing means. She turned her finances over to her brother Ed, who handled them wisely, making investments, collecting money due her. In the depression of the early 1920s she had suffered a number of losses, having been less careful than she thought. Under Ed's highly conservative management, this would not happen again.

Dorothy set a budget for herself and lived within it. She saw no reason for what she considered extravagances. When a new luxury train was added to the New York-New Orleans run, it did not interest her. As she prepared for a trip East a friend asked: "Why not take the extra-fare train?" Dorothy frowned; it would cost fifteen or twenty dollars more, and why should she pay it when she was perfectly satisfied with the regular train?

On the other hand, she gave sums every year to support a pair who were distant connections of her family in Kentucky. To several associates of her New York days she made repeated contributions, often in such a way that the recipient himself did not know where the money came from. When she gave regular checks to a woman relative, she sent additional money directly to the husband—"for your personal needs." She wished to spare him the necessity of going to his wife for cigarette money, change for haircuts and the like.

Dorothy had worked out her schedule so well that she could make another long trip, this time to Europe in 1924–25. She also undertook a project she had been considering for some years—the construction of a new house to fit her needs. She wished her brother and his family to be near her, but she did not want a household requiring a large staff. Accordingly she and her brother "built a duplex so that we could be under the same roof."

The site chosen for the new residence was at the edge of tree-bordered Audubon Park, one of the great public parks of the South. The house was to be a handsome stucco structure in the Spanish style, with ironwork, interior arches, and a flagstone terrace. While it went up, Dorothy enjoyed months of travel, adding to her treasure of memories.

The prudent of us lay up money for a rainy day. Why should we not be provident enough to lay up happy and amusing memories for the long time when we are ill, or old, or bored and nothing exciting happens to us any more? Believe me, we can buy more happiness with them than we can with cash that we have in the bank.

Memories, she observed, "are our doors of escape, our compensation. After a great success or great pleasure, anyone might say with the French king: 'Let fate do its worst. I have dined.'"

Fire Bells and Three Farewells

n the late fall of 1926 Dorothy Dix, like the old fire horse turned out to pasture, heard the clang of bells again. Ten years earlier she had "foresworn murder as a profession" and, she said, never regretted her decision. Yet now her ears pricked up as she heard details of the case she was to call the most dramatic since Harry Thaw's.

Four years earlier in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Dr. Edward W. Hall, the handsome pastor of the Protestant Episcopal Church of St. John the Evangelist—forty, dynamic, and socially prominent—had been found with a bullet through his head under a crabapple tree on a lonely lovers' lane. Beside him rested Eleanor Mills of his choir, the pretty wife of the church janitor, mother of two grown children. In her brain were three bullets. Her throat had been slashed so violently that her head was almost cut off. Tongue, larynx, and windpipe had been torn out, and her abdomen ripped open.

Whoever committed the crime had placed the bodies together,

the woman's head on the pastor's arm, and had spread around them their love letters to one another, in which the rector pictured himself as her "gypsy king." Mrs. Mills, who read confession magazines, had acted like one of her heroines, and had claimed another woman's man. Somebody had murdered both of them as a consequence.

Nothing had resulted from the first investigation in 1922, but now charges were made that friends of the minister's wife had whitewashed the affair and bought off the investigators. One of the latter had disappeared, and now he returned to admit that he had taken a bribe. One or two witnesses claimed they had seen Dr. Hall's widow, a businessman brother, and another brother—a peculiar, dull-witted individual—at the murder scene. Here was scandal in high places, justice thwarted, sex behind the pulpit. As the world watched intently, the state now charged Mrs. Hall and her two brothers with the killings.

There were several good reasons why Dorothy did not expect to cover the Hall-Mills case. Many readers had forgotten that she had once covered murders, and, as "mother confessor" to the country, she had assumed by now another and larger role. There seemed some danger that the loyal followers of her column would think trial reports by her "undignified." It would certainly be a long-drawn-out affair, lasting at least a month, and interrupting her already heavy schedule of columns. Moreover, Dorothy would soon be sixty-five, and she had grown out of the habit of meeting daily deadlines.

She happened to be visiting New York at the time, staying briefly at the Bretton Hall apartment hotel, from which she had covered so many other cases. The syndicate and one newspaper after another wired and telephoned: This was the greatest crime story of the twenties thus far; why shouldn't the greatest crime reporter cover it? The syndicate managers increased their offers—a thousand dollars and more a week, in addition to her usual payment for the column. Still Miss Dix hesitated.

An errand took her to Madison Avenue, somewhere in the fifties, an area of excellent antique shops. She saw in a window a superb Korean cabinet, its camphor-wood frame intricately orna-

mented. She asked the price, and then estimated, if the Hall-Mills trial took only three weeks that would easily pay for it.

The next day she signed the contract and in time had herself driven to New Jersey. Across the country went banner headlines and newspaper advertisements: Read Dorothy Dix on Hall-Mills!

Ishbell Ross has told how, when Mrs. Hall took the stand, she was watched "by a tiny figure, housewifely and plump, who looked like somebody's grandmother who had strayed by accident onto a scene of horror." Few recognized Dorothy, "she looked too mild for such grim surroundings. Her smile was kind, her silver hair reassuring under the cluster of cherries that bobbed from the brim of her hat. Yet no one who witnessed the melodramatic happenings was any better fitted to estimate the motives of the eccentric human beings" of the trial.

To most newspaper men and women on the scene, the guilt seemed clear; Mrs. Hall, a chill, gray-eyed, gray-haired woman nearly ten years older than the minister, apparently had committed the murders with her brothers. There were contradictions in their stories, and damaging testimony from other witnesses. The whole town had known of the rector's affairs with the choir singer and other women in the parish, and yet Mrs. Hall claimed she had never heard of his infidelity.

She and one of her two brothers admitted they had gone out that night, and their stories did not ring true. Soon afterward she had sent away a coat to be dyed, and some said it had been bloodstained. She had never notified the police, yet she had talked in a way that indicated she expected her husband's body to be found.

Dorothy Dix, after a few hours of concentrated looking and listening, made up her own mind that the three accused people were not guilty. She let her opinion show in nearly every line she wrote. A young associate in the syndicate tells how he pleaded with her not to go too far out on a limb.

Dorothy Dix shook her head. She thought she knew people, and she would back her own view to the hilt. While the young man bit his nails, she did just that. Repeatedly she presented Frances Stevens Hall as a woman whose background and lifetime habits would not have allowed her to kill, much less be a party to so savage a murder. Mrs. Hall was, Dorothy said, "that strangest of creatures, a woman who doesn't talk, who draws a veil over her wounds." She had never been beautiful; her features were too strong. "The way she dresses makes you think of Queen Mary."

Friends called Mrs. Hall lovable and kind, and when she smiled, as she did on rare occasions, the immobile mask of her face lighted up "as if a lamp had flamed out through a transparent vase." Dorothy pictured the Stevens family residence as a fine, red-brick, pillared house, filled with Victorian furniture. It was easy, she said, to imagine the wife suffering there behind closed shutters, hearing the rumors about her husband's furtive affairs, and rigorously suppressing any feeling she had.

Frances Stevens had come of old stock, Dorothy discovered, with ancestors from New England: members of the Boston Tea Party, aides to Lafayette, famous admirals, a cousin who was president of the New York Stock Exchange. Nevertheless, the girl had had a difficult childhood. Her father died when she was two, and she grew up alone, shy and repressed, under the bleak guidance of a Puritan mother. "For all her money and social position"—the family owned about half the town—"she led a dull and drab life."

Then the pious mother favored Dr. Hall, handsome and charming, and Frances had her first and only suitor. Studying her infrequent gestures and expressions, Dorothy Dix felt certain that this gaunt woman had been deeply in love with him. The minister had brought incredible brightness "into that cold and desolate home," and this, Frances Hall would never forget. Before long, however, he found romance elsewhere and began to exchange notes with Eleanor Mills. He had used a place behind a set of Bibles as a cache for love letters—notes which Dorothy thought a "mixture of church and desire," typical of the man who had turned from preaching to casual affairs.

Mrs. Hall was put on the stand and sat in anguish as the state's attorney taunted her by reading the passionate words her husband had written to another woman. She was asked how she felt about the expressions of joyous love that Dr. Hall had used in writing to Eleanor Mills. Didn't she sense the man's yearning, his hunger for Mrs. Mills? . . . On and on went the torture.

Behind Frances Hall, wrote Dorothy Dix, were generations of men and women who had been "taught to control themselves." Once, when Frances was asked if she noticed any change in her husband's attitude, her voice broke, but only once. The cultured words had no edge. The eyes showed no emotion except "a sort of cold contempt." She repeated what she had first said: she still could not think her husband had wronged her. She could not believe it of so fine a man, for she knew his feeling for her. And Dorothy Dix commented:

I have never seen a more pitiful sight than this poor, proud woman, clinging with desperate hands to the last shred of her belief in a man who has been proved unworthy. . . . If there is ever a lie on which the recording angel drops a tear that blots it out, it is the one that a wife tells to cover up her husband's defections. Millions of women—God bless them and pity them—tell these white lies. They speak of a drunken husband's shiftlessness as "the artistic temperament." They speak of "the reserve" of a cold and unloving husband. And millions of women boast of the devotion of husbands who are tired of them and neglect them, as if they could conjure back the love they yearn for by pretending that the thing they want to be true is true. . . . And so she lied like a lady about her husband.

Steadily Frances Hall resisted all efforts to prove that she was resentful, or jealous. She was subjected, Dorothy said, to the harshest of tests when she had to look at the bloodstained clothes her husband had worn, and the cheap blue-and-white dotted dress, with red trimming, which had been ripped from the body of her husband's sweetheart. The state brought out one gruesome object after another and Dorothy was reminded of medieval trials by ordeal.

Many of the professional crime reporters thought that Mrs. Hall would break down. She did not. She stared straight at her accusers, and tightened her mouth as the famous "Pig Woman," the wild-eyed Jane Gibson, was carried in on a cot. Close to death, the Pig Woman made an incoherent and hysterical witness, whose testi-

mony indicated that Mrs. Hall must have stayed for hours with the two bodies. Dorothy Dix considered this very unlikely.

From Mrs. Hall's account and from the remarks of other witnesses, Dorothy Dix decided that the other woman, Mrs. Mills, was a "weak, silly victim of her own passions . . . thin, neurotic, forever dissatisfied." Eleanor Mills had hated her meek husband and sought a "poor, sordid romance." She had been no adventuress. Dorothy noted a small, significant fact: on the night of her death, Mrs. Mills had worn a pair of ten-cent stockings and the cheapest of dresses. Her love had gained her nothing of material value.

There was a possibility that her husband James Mills might be guilty. But Dorothy Dix dismissed that solution quickly. She pictured Jimmy Mills as a tame house-pet of a man, "who stood in deadly fear of his wife and daughter. Once, when Eleanor left the house and he called to ask where she was going, she taunted him: 'Follow me and find out.'" Here Dorothy added a detail from her own experience:

Once upon a time I saw a cornered rabbit with its back against a wall, feebly and futilely fighting a pack of dogs that had set upon it. The eyes of the rabbit were the eyes of Jimmy Mills as he faced the lawyers who tore from him all the secrets of his poor, pitiful life.

Life had whipped Jimmy Mills, she thought. He had accepted even his wife's unfaithfulness, because there was nothing else for him to do . . .

Meanwhile, one of Mrs. Hall's brothers had worked to establish the fact that he had not been at the murder scene. The other brother, Willie, was known to be "peculiar." He was big, moonfaced, with bushy hair low over his forehead and a weak mouth that smiled at everything.

Willie, Dorothy observed, was a rich man, yet he spent nearly every day at the firehouse, cheerfully running errands for the firemen; he donned a red helmet and danced in delight about a real fire, and even built small bonfires for the children. But nobody had ever managed to picture Willie as anything but gentle, dreamy, harmless.

When Willie was put on the stand, there was a sudden hush. Everyone realized that the lawyers might badger Willie into some terrible admissions, or at least trap him in errors. Dorothy Dix waited, and heard Willie astonish his listeners. Politely, resolutely, answering questions with a friendly "yes, sir" or "no, sir," he maintained every detail of his story.

He seemed to understand every point raised; he responded directly, and then, in oddly polished English, he sometimes corrected the grammar of the state's attorney. Several fingerprinting experts swore that the print on a card found at the scene was definitely made by Willie; an equal number swore that "never in the world" could it have been made by Willie. Dorothy sniffed: "They agree only that fingerprinting is an exact science!"

She concluded that nobody would ever know just what had happened that evening. Like quarrelsome children, the witnesses had disagreed with one another and done everything but tell a straight story. She would never convict anyone on such confused evidence.

Her experienced eye roved over the jurors: "fat, middle-aged, well-fed." She reflected: "It is the very young and the very old that are hard and uncompromising in their judgment. In the middle ages we know how to make excuses and to give our fellow creatures the benefit of the doubt." As she had anticipated, the jurors freed Mrs. Hall and her brothers.

The gray, tired widow shook Dorothy's hand in gratitude, and some said that Mrs. Hall almost broke down at that moment. For Dorothy the case was a triumph, too. Ishbell Ross wrote: "It was generally conceded that her stories were the best analytical writing done on the trial." Her coverage had been, above all, a demonstration of compassionate understanding.

For her the fire bells would not ring again. She said, a bit wistfully, that she saw a kind of fate in her assignment to the Hall-Mills affair. Back in 1901, Dorothy had begun her crime career with the death of a child in a New Jersey town; she ended it with another New Jersey mystery. She was free now to return to New Orleans, and with her she took the Korean treasure she had wanted. She always pointed it out as "my Hall-Mills Oriental cabinet."

In early June of 1927, the woman whose last schooling had been a half term at Hollins Institute was honored by Tulane University, in New Orleans, which granted her the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. In presenting her, Dean Pierce Butler hailed Miss Dix as "a citizen not only of New Orleans but of the United States, who through many years has contributed greatly to the good things of this life, substantially, sensibly interpreted." Among those who looked on, his emotion showing in his eyes, was John S. Kendall, her associate of the old days on the Picayune, now Tulane's professor of Spanish.

Though she was deeply moved, Dorothy said little. "I feel all puffed up," she smiled. "I'm proud and happy and humble."

The following year, when Dorothy was preparing to leave the city on a long trip, a project developed almost overnight to honor her in another fashion—a "Dorothy Dix Day." For some years she had rejected suggestions of tributes, such as luncheons, dinners, meetings.

Now, however, a committee of Orleanians called on Dorothy. They explained that women of all sorts—factory workers, housewives, welfare officials, and others—wanted a public program at which thousands who admired her could finally have the chance to see her and wish her Godspeed on her vacation. Dorothy agreed to the plan.

It was June of 1928, and City Park was chosen as the setting. The steps of Delgado museum, at the end of a long driveway, provided the focal point. Near by stood the old Creole dueling oaks. Roses lined the walks, and trees and vines were in blossom; this was the kind of day for which Dorothy said she liked the city best. In the great crowd that awaited her were laborers, office secretaries, women in gingham dresses with babies in their arms and others in fashionable garden-party clothes, school girls and women of eighty, delivery messengers, teachers, doctors, lawyers—New Orleans in cross section.

Two committeemen helped her through, with the assistance of policemen. The crowd cheered, and called her name, "but Dorothy looked more bewildered than pleased, at least in the beginning," said a witness. At the top of the stairs an excited girl presented

flowers with a stiff little speech whose words contrasted with her eager smile. Later Dorothy was presented with a silver tureen and referred to as "the most inspiring adviser since St. Paul."

For once she really seemed dumfounded. Profoundly stirred, she spoke to the crowd. "You are my friends. You know, it's easy to make strangers like us; we can smile and be pleasant and say something bright and that's that. When it comes to our friends, it's something else." She managed a smile. "A friend is somebody who knows all about you and likes you in spite of it."

Almost immediately after "Dorothy Dix Day" she started for Asia and months of travel. At the last minute a few friends became disturbed because she planned to form a party to cross parts of the African desert that no white woman had yet traveled. The Sheik was a best seller in the twenties, and the alarmists warned her, "You don't know what could happen, with kidnapers and all that."

Dorothy's eyes brightened: "You mean a real sheik might get me?"

"Yes."

"Well, if one does, wait three months before you send after me!" she commanded. She was then sixty-seven.

To Dorothy and her traveling companion the jaunt was exciting as well as enlightening. Four days before they set out from Damascus to Bagdad in a motor caravan, desert raiders descended on another party, killed one man, and robbed the others. Dorothy remarked calmly: "This makes it a lot more interesting." She was particularly pleased, she said, when the leader of native guards stationed himself beside her car and stayed there throughout the entire journey. "He stood six feet six in his sandals, and was very handsome," she explained. No sheik came within waving distance.

On her return she received the first reports of disturbing changes in the condition of her husband. At the asylum, where George Gilmer had received careful attention, his physical health revealed signs of decline. He had developed a serious heart condition, and the doctors did not expect him to survive long.

Dorothy had not seen George since he left her in New York.

His bitter feeling toward her had only grown stronger. He blamed her still for all his troubles, falling into a rage at any mention of her name. George's family continued to visit him, and they concurred in the doctors' suggestion that no purpose could be served by a visit from Dorothy.

For Dorothy Dix another time of trial and self-examination had arrived. Her family and friends assured her she had done all any wife could have done, and more than most, but she still tended to reproach herself. For weeks, her friends said, she showed an untypical gloom and uncertainty, staying close to the house, waiting for the news that must soon arrive. "She looked sick, physically sick," one recalled, "with lines at the corners of her mouth that I had never seen before."

Then, one morning in early January of 1929, word came by telephone that George had died. He had gone quietly, without struggle; and for this assurance, at least, she could be grateful. In late afternoon of the same day George was buried quietly in the Gilmer vault in Metairie Cemetery.

The almost half-century of her union had ended. So much had happened to her and to George, so much that neither could have anticipated. It had never been a happy marriage, but over and over she had tried to make it endure. George himself had broken the bond. Nevertheless she suffered in this hour of his death. Alone, she strode steadily back and forth, back and forth, her eyes closed in pain.

Dorothy tried to follow her usual working schedule but found it harder than at almost any other time in her life. She remembered her own prescription, the one she herself had followed at other times, and she began to apply herself steadily, without interruption, to the routine of her correspondence. As always, these letters from other anguished men and women helped restore her balance.

Never, then or later, did she allow herself the bitterness or harsh comment that might have been expected. After a time, realizing that the outlines of the story of her marriage were known, she went over the facts briefly, without comment. What had happened to George and to her had happened to many others; to have

made a greater mystery of the matter would have been without purpose, and foolish.

She and her brother Ed bought a country place to which Dorothy could go on week ends to escape the telephone, the demands of city life, and requests "to do everything from hunting up a boardinghouse for somebody who wants to spend the winter in the South, to naming a baby or telling a telephone caller how to get rid of her pimples and get back her boy friend."

The country place, a long white house with sweeping galleries, was at Pass Christian, eighty miles from New Orleans on the Gulf, not far from the cottage to which Dorothy had gone many years earlier in the successful effort to regain her health and composure. In those days, broken in spirit, she had walked unsteadily along the sands, asking herself what she could do about a life that seemed under a cloud. Now decades later, she had come back, the most successful woman in her profession, famous all over the world.

At Pass Christian she surrounded herself with her nephews, now grown, their wives, and her grandnieces and grandnephews. She did almost no entertaining, and had few callers in this place of rest. She explained that she wanted only to sit under the trees. "Here I invite my soul and indulge my passion for gardening. Stone walls smother me and I should die—and be glad to do it—if I could not have my own ground under my feet, and could not delve in mother earth, and did not have green things and flowers about me."

More and more in these years at the Gulf Coast house, and in her apartment on the park, her aging father enjoyed being with Dorothy. He enjoyed Dorothy's friends, their conversations, and their parties. When it could be arranged, he went calling with her, and often she sat in the corner while Pa took over. Passing around his cigarettes, retailing stories of his own life, Pa seemed the youngest-spirited person in the room. At ninety he chided men of fifty: "Stop acting so old."

Sometimes, though he did not intend it, Will Douglas's needs interfered with her work. She tried always to dictate her columns in the morning, not stopping until noon or 1:00 P.M. In his last

years Pa, staying with her several months at a time, spent his mornings mooning around the apartment, picking up a paper, putting it down, peering into the room in which she worked, then going sadly away. Pa felt lonely; he did not see why his daughter could not drop everything and talk with him.

The situation disturbed Dorothy. More often than she should have done, she interrupted her dictation to go and chat with him and plan an amusement. "I remembered how much he had done for me when I was run-down and agitated," she explained. "He had brought me back. And how could I begrudge giving him some of the time he had taken to help me?"

Year after year he remained handsome, pink-cheeked, white-haired. He believed in getting full wear from his clothes, and, though immaculate in his dark suits and wing collars, he generally wore them too long. Every January first, Dorothy combined a birthday party for Pa with a general family reception. Pa delighted in it, and so did the nephews, nieces, cousins, and other relatives. By now Pa said he didn't want gifts on his birthday; he preferred to give them to others, and he did.

He had once announced he would live to be a hundred and twenty. Slowly he lowered his sights, setting them at a mere hundred, and he remained convinced that he would make it. But in 1930, when he was ninety-three, his health slowly declined. Dorothy wrote a friend that he was merely holding to life with both hands. He had the habit of living and would "simply not give up." Months passed and he fought "feebly and pitifully and desperately with death, on the very edge of the grave, and strangely enough, held his enemy off by sheer will power." To the end, despite failing hearing and sight, Pa insisted on sitting at the dinner table at meal times and also on playing his beloved cards. And, added his daughter, "he is just like a little child in the way he clings to me."

On the day before his death, he enjoyed his final game of bridge. During the night he developed a chill and fell into a coma. "We can be thankful that he was spared further suffering. He passed away beautifully, no sadness of farewell, without even knowing that the end had come. He just fell asleep like a tired old child at the end of a long day."

The family took Pa to Clarksville, Tennessee, where he had spent much of his life. Dorothy wrote simply: "We laid him to rest in his old home, among his old friends, and the whole country-side gathered to do him honor. It was a great tribute to a life that had been filled with love for others and that had reaped love in return."

First Lady of New Orleans

epression, bread lines, then NRA, WPA, TVA, and slow revival . . . In times of national strain, as in the happier years of the speak-easy and the Charleston, the troubled citizens of the nation consulted Miss Dix. She would sit for a long time staring at desperate messages—from a wife who saw her husband holding despairingly to a last pay check, from a girl who had to support two parents and a younger brother but could find no job, from a man fired a few months before his pension went into effect.

The suicide notes multiplied, and with them her special-delivery replies of appeal and persuasion. Repeatedly, she was asked to run again the messages that had saved men and women from taking their own lives.

On the other hand, Dorothy discovered that there were certain compensations even in these troubled times. The depression brought families closer together, she noticed. Men who had gone out alone nearly every night in the week stayed in now and rediscovered home life. Women who again had to do their own housework had less time to be bored or to acquire neuroses.

But the depression was hard on young couples who didn't have enough money to get married. She had little patience with those who couldn't wait:

Lovers who marry on a shoestring delude themselves into believing that love is enough and that after marriage they will be content to live on bread and cheese and kisses, and desire nothing else. . . . They fool themselves. After marriage they are just as hungry for beefsteaks as they were before. . . . So my advice is to be wise enough to wait for your wedding cake until you can afford it."

For those already married, Dorothy Dix urged that they do without luxuries and remain together in spite of economic pressures. Some, she felt sure, had simply become too used to "silk stockings, beauty parlors and movies every night." She received a profound shock, she said, when she heard from a young man who had an attractive wife with whom he had spent several happy years. Now it appeared that they had suffered reverses and were ready to give up their marriage primarily because of their automobile. "He told me they were thinking of getting a divorce, because she could then go back and live with her people and he with his. They would be able to have a car again and use it together. I wrote him that he had gasoline instead of blood in his veins!"

The replies she wrote were as refreshingly realistic as ever.

To a girl who thought her trouble in attracting men arose from the fact that she was not a clever conversationalist, Dorothy suggested that she could become something much better: an intelligent listener. "Believe me, daughter, there is far more profit to a girl in lending her ears than in using her tongue." She recommended an almost certain formula—two words! As long as the girl could murmur "How wonderful" every time the man paused for breath, he would probably never get enough of her company.

To a foolish bride who suffered from jealousy of the departed first wife, Dorothy answered sharply: "Any woman who has no rival nearer than the cemetery should be down on her knees thanking heaven. It is the live sirens the wife has cause to worry over, not the dead ones."

A United States Supreme Court Justice wrote her: "I have just

finished reading one of your essays. I have always admired them and have wondered how one person could give so many sound views on so many problems and argue them so ably."

But in South Carolina a harassed husband gave testimony in reverse fashion to Miss Dix's effectiveness. He went into court for an injunction (which he did not get) to keep his wife from reading him the Dorothy Dix column at breakfast every day.

In 1931—the last year of the Hoover presidency—Dorothy Dix received a second honorary degree, this one from Oglethorpe University. At the same time that institution gave similar recognition to a man increasingly in the eye and mind of the world—Franklin D. Roosevelt, of New York.

That same year Dorothy visited Tahiti. In her newspaper days in New York, she had been an expert on "love nests." Now, in this South Sea retreat, she inspected the world's greatest assortment of love nests, "cluttered with husbands and wives—the other women's husbands with the other men's wives."

At Papeete, Dorothy beheld the goal toward which so many of the world's passionate rebels were striving, an earthly paradise with limitless leisure, limitless liquor, and limitless love. "And I found them bored to tears, dissatisfied, disconsolate, bickering." Her talks with these men and women proved to her what she had always contended—"that love is only the dessert of life. The minute you try to live on dessert, you get sick of it; and you can get sicker of love than you can of anything else in the world." Dorothy remembered Solomon, wisest of Biblical kings, and his cry against too much love: "Stay with me flagons, comfort me with apples . . ."

What woman, in heaven's name, unless she is drunk on newfound passion, wants a man around the house all the time? The ideal man to women, if they'd tell the truth, is a man who gets out of the house before nine o'clock in the morning and never shows up again until five in the afternoon. I don't believe a woman would ever marry a man if she figured in advance that she'd have to eat luncheon with him every day.

Human beings are so constituted that men and women have got

to have temporary and repeated vacations from each other, if living together is to be even tolerable.

In Tahiti, she went on to say you've "got nothing to do but eat, drink, swim, fish and make love. . . . The idea makes me, as a woman, shudder. Picture yourself condemned to years of kissing one woman with the ardor she expects, the ardor of the first time you kissed her. It's inhuman. People trying to justify one of these hurricane passions tell you 'God is love.' I disagree; God is work."

Tahiti convinced her of it.

Her life had now entered a new and more tranquil phase, without strain, without uncertainties. She was finally at home in the house designed to fit her needs and her temperament. In the manywindowed apartment in New Orleans, she felt "perched in the treetops," and she liked it that way. From her sun porch she saw the glint of water in the park lagoon, and in the branches a few feet away she watched the mockingbirds build their nests.

All about her clustered "the loot of my inheritances and also my wanderings over the world." On one wall hung a Persian prayer rug dating back to the sixteenth or seventeenth century, perhaps her best possession. Under chandeliers that had dripped candle wax on dandies of the Second Empire stood a Sheraton bookcase brought from Scotland by her great-great-grandfather. Near by was a small old piano with six legs and a signature date of 1807, which she had discovered at an auction.

Two Korean butterfly candlesticks flanked a time-mellowed Buddha, while in another corner was a Spanish chest at one time in the Cathedral of Guatemala. Another room contained a Moroccan divan covered with a Berber rug and a North African coffee table made of rare woods. "A jumble of styles and countries"—she raised a quizzical eyebrow—"and an interior decorator's nightmare. But it's me and mine. If somebody dropped down out of an airplane he could tell in a moment: Dorothy Dix."

She had great pride in a heavily carved French boudoir set, ornamented with ormolu and marquetry of colored woods. On a trip to Paris she found it locked away in a dingy apartment; the agent spoke of a mystery associated with it involving a lady of the

court. When taking guests through the apartment, Dorothy often paused before this set and said with a twinkle "I'll bet I'm the only respectable woman that ever slept in this bed!"

During most of her life Dorothy had no time for "society" as such, and no interest in it. Occasionally she had poked fun at professional society women. But now she found herself more and more of a public figure in New Orleans, a personage with obligations and responsibilities. She gradually became a grande dame, the Great Lady of New Orleans an honored guest at dinners, one whose presence was courted for debutante parties and receptions.

"These people must think I'm the hungriest dame in town," she complained in a letter. "Always offering me a meal." Nevertheless she liked a party whenever her work allowed her to get to one; she went out, as always, to "keep my eyes on people, and my ears near them." Greatest reportorial listener of her generation, she never lost interest in current attitudes and opinions.

"She'd be right there, silent but listening," said her old friend, Mr. Kendall. "On her face I saw the same expression that had been there in the nineties. She seemed to be asking herself: Why is this fellow talking that way? What made the woman act as she did? And, somehow, she knew! Wisely, she sat there, watching and understanding."

Mrs. Marcus Feingold recalls how Dorothy read "practically every national magazine to know what was going on." One day she mentioned a news story of some importance, and Mrs. Feingold admitted she had not heard about it. "You mean you let things like that get by you? Well, go home and catch up!" Mrs. Feingold did.

For years Dorothy Dix had turned down invitations to join clubs, explaining that she found her work too demanding. In 1932, Le Petit Salon—an exclusive organization of New Orleans matrons—asked her to be its president. Dorothy Dix hesitated, then agreed on condition that committee work would be handled by others.

Thereafter the Salon became an important part of her life. Ill or well, temporarily caught up with her work or staggering under a burden of columns and letters, she went regularly every Thursday during the season to the organization's handsome, iron-galleried headquarters in the French Quarter. Her brother Ed, joking about

her conscientious attendance, called the day her "Holy Thursday."

One of her closest friends and most constant traveling companions was Mrs. Arthur Nolte, the statuesque and imposing woman who was Dorothy's beloved Nellie.

When they traveled Mrs. Nolte walked ahead with the air of a court lady, while Dorothy trotted almost humbly behind. Frequently someone whispered: "There's Dorothy Dix." Almost always the onlookers mistook Mrs. Nolte for the less commanding Dorothy. Miss Dix herself smiled: "Nellie carried it off better than I could. She looks the way I should!"

Another of Dorothy's dear friends was Mrs. Matilda Gray, one of Louisiana's great landowners, who was considerably younger. Dorothy respected Matilda's executive ability and her generous spirit; "also she's pretty fine company."

In these days Dorothy also came to know better Captain and Mrs. James Dinkins. It was at the home of the Captain's daughter that a suggestion developed which made New Orleans history. For years groups of young Orleanians had ridden around the city in trucks on Mardi Gras, donning costumes and throwing favors to the crowds. Someone said to Dorothy: "Why shouldn't we do it, too"?

"Why not?" asked Dorothy. The thought of a truckful of elderly women, headed by the old war veteran, was revolutionary, and it delighted her. "We'll give the city the greatest rattling of old bones it's ever heard!"

With qualms, but gay and delighted, they dressed themselves in costumes of the sixties, ancestors' dresses with lace and old jewelry. Beside the Captain stood Dorothy, hoop-skirted, pantaletted, and wearing a flowered poke bonnet, her white hair tucked inside a frame of blue; the moment New Orleans recognized her, it shouted in delight.

Many still remember how they blinked when the vehicle inched along crowded St. Charles Avenue. Hundreds ran up to wave and call greetings. A woman in a streetcar recalled: "I said no, it couldn't be. But there it was—that wonderful little wrinkled face. I forgot myself and cried out; people threw open windows and in a moment we were all yelling and clapping hands, and she seemed happy. Very happy."

Flood Crest

or half a century and more, it is unlikely that many people received a greater volume of mail than Dorothy Dix. During the increasing international tension in the late 1930s it approached its peak, four to five hundred letters a day and often higher.

Years earlier her column had global coverage, going first to England and Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, then to Japan, the Philippines and Puerto Rico, Mexico and other Latin American nations. Her following in the Far East was phenomenal, and when she visited the Philippines and Australia, she found herself hailed as a great public figure.

On one of her Japanese trips, her train was suddenly halted. "A general or something like that," Dorothy groaned to her traveling companion. A moment later her fellow passengers and seemingly all the population of the area were rushing toward her, and with them marched a trim group in stiffly starched uniforms. The Girl Scouts of Japan had sent representatives to honor Miss Dix!

A Chinese merchant, having read a collection of her columns in

his own language, wrote from Tientsin that he felt "very honorable" to be able to tell her how her "wise advices" were helping his people. In other years Chinese couples had "very little chance to love, even to know each other before they were married." Unions arranged by the parents were no longer required, but even now, he said, "our experiences are insufficient to meet the new conditions."

His wife, wrote this admirer, had become "most excited" on reading her first Dix column, and had assured him that if she had come upon Dorothy several years earlier they would have avoided "many marriage mistakes." The Dix writings remained on his desk, to be read "whenever we have something wrong"; and the couple wanted Dorothy's picture on the wall, to be prayed to in times of difficulty.

Dorothy Dix had now reorganized her work. For years she had managed to get along with one secretary and for about five years this assistant was Beulah Gold, a cousin of her sister-in-law, Daisy Meriwether. By 1928 Miss Gold had married and moved to California, and was replaced by her sister Clare, who became Mrs. Cyril Ryan. In January of 1927 Dorothy asked her friend Mrs. Stanley Arthur to assist her, and Mrs. Arthur remained her confidential secretary for twenty-two years. With the help of Mrs. Arthur and Mrs. Ryan, Miss Dix breasted the flood of messages that swept daily over her desk.

Ella Arthur knew Dorothy Dix during most of her life. Stanley Clisby Arthur, her husband-to-be, had become one of Dorothy's friends while a reporter on the New Orleans *Item*. At that time, early in 1908, he took his fiancée to call on Miss Dix, and young Ella watched "with fascination and more than a little awe" as Dorothy Dix prepared café brûlot in the darkened room.

Soon afterward the Stanley Arthurs went to New York where, in part through Dorothy's influence, Stanley took a job on the Journal and eventually did a weekly feature, "Young-Man-Afraid-of-His-Wife," about light domestic difficulties of the recently married. In his work and in Ella Arthur's poems and other writings Dorothy took an interest that grew with the years.

In New York the Arthurs' friendship with the Gilmers became

Flood Crest 259

steadily a closer one. Dorothy took them and their two babies for long drives in her early Maxwell, introduced them to other newspaper celebrities, and in general "treated us like her own children." Baby-sitting had not yet come into being, and the junior Stanley slept through Dix parties on Dorothy's bed. She made him the subject of a column on how to bring up a boy.

When the Arthurs wrote the popular Sonny Boy's Day at the Zoo, in verse and photographs, Dorothy Dix did the foreword. After six years in New York when the Arthur children grew sickly, Dorothy urged the couple to go back South. For the next eight years they kept up a close correspondence with her. When she returned to New Orleans the old companionship was resumed. They belonged to the same social groups and were regularly in one another's company.

Ella Arthur's weekly sketches on domestic subjects, in the Picayune, drew Dorothy's commendation. In 1927, realizing that she needed additional assistance, Miss Dix asked Ella Arthur to take the full-time job of handling the bulk of her mail, while she gave her undivided effort to the column itself.

"Though my world revolved around my husband and home," Mrs. Arthur explained, "I was flattered to be associated with the work of my famous friend. I welcomed, of course, an increase in income, and—an important factor—I could do everything at home, according to my own schedule." So began a new, more systematic regime.

The letters that went-into her column absorbed more and more of Dorothy Dix's waking time. Her working hours continued for the most part from eight o'clock until noon, but there seemed hardly an hour of the day when the letters were not before her. Almost always four or five of the most difficult to answer lay under a book or paperweight on her desk, and at odd moments she would reread and puzzle over them. Intruders who managed to violate her strict working schedule, or friends who arrived early, would find her thus absorbed.

"Every morning I arise with the lark at seven o'clock, if that is the time the lark gets up," she once explained. At her bedside she had her "small black," the tiny cup of thick dripped coffee, without cream or sugar, which is the Louisianian's traditional staff of life. Bread comes second.

After dressing, Dorothy devoted a few minutes to domestic duties and then had a light breakfast, a bit of dry toast and more coffee. "I can't write on a full stomach," she said, and quoted Arthur Brisbane's opinion that the world would never have heard of poetry if everybody had beefsteak for the morning meal. Until noon she would keep her appetite in leash and meanwhile would be "ready to wrestle with the world's woes."

The mailman needed an extra pouch to handle her mail; at times the post office delivered it in a truck. Miss Dix provided her helpers with large straw hampers of the old-fashioned variety in which to stack the mail and to sort it.

People continued to ask if she did not make up many of the letters which she used in her column, but no one who saw the mail arrive at her address raised the question. "There's never been a need for it," she explained. "Any subject that you'd want to find is here, treated daily in a dozen different ways. My main problem is to keep abreast of them, and pick from among them."

After Miss Dix's strictly personal letters were extracted from the morning delivery, the balance was taken by her chauffeur in market-sized baskets to the home of Mrs. Arthur, several blocks away. Mrs. Arthur's task was to read and sort the letters, from which a dozen or so were selected for particular interest or appeal, to be considered by Miss Dix for the column itself. Mrs. Arthur answered most of the queries that contained self-addressed, stamped envelopes. She used variations of Dix replies based on her years of study of the Dix method.

Meanwhile those "best" letters, chosen for quality, special problems, or new angles, provided direct subject matter for the columnist's daily "Talks" and brought personal answers to the correspondents. The query itself might be so original that it piqued Dorothy Dix's curiosity and interest. To Mrs. Ryan, whom Miss Dix referred to as "my lovely young secretary," she dictated steadily each day, with few interruptions.

The backbreaking task of answering her mail might have been

Flood Crest 261

lightened by general use of form letters, but Dorothy Dix preferred personal replies. A few forms were used, covering such common-place topics as "How to be popular," "Where to go for legal advice," "When are girls old enough for dates." In reply to girls who asked about popularity, Miss Dix offered these general suggestions.

Take care of your personal appearance and be as easy on the eyes as you can. Dress suitably and tastefully. Wear the clothes that flatter you and always be immaculately neat and clean. Be amiable. Never make spiteful and catty remarks. Never for the sake of getting a laugh say anything that hurts people's feelings. Learn how to do things so that you will fit into any crowd. Especially learn how to dance well and to play a good game of bridge.*

Never talk about yourself to others. Talk to them about themselves and remember they like to be jollied. Show appreciation of all courtesies that are extended to you. Be a good listener. Read the newspapers, the movie magazines and other timely periodicals and you will not lack for interesting subjects of conversation.

Whereas this sort of advice took care of some cases, all too many letters included specific inquiries which she thought called for individual answers. The form reply was not often used.

Changes in American life affected the nature of much of her correspondence. The growth of social services meant that she no longer had to direct so many people to welfare agencies; the development of vocational guidance organizations provided another source of help to which she could make reference.

Many people wondered exactly what happened to the tens of thousands of the letters which she received. The potentialities for blackmail appeared tremendous. Suppose someone broke in and rifled a Dix file? The danger existed, perhaps, but it was minimized by Dorothy herself, who soon learned to keep almost no files. She selected a small fraction of the mail of particular interest to her, and these notes always remained near her, under lock and key. Her chauffeur regularly burned the rest.

The post office handled the Dix mail quickly and efficiently. She

^{*}She herself, of course, continued to abhor card games.

became good friends with the Negro postmen, whom she sometimes met at the door. "A lot of mail today, Miss Dix. Real trouble," one would say. "We got a load of grief for you, ma'am" . . . "Poor people sure in a mess this week!"

Frequently in the 1930s when Dorothy Dix printed a particularly touching problem, readers responded in unexpected fashion. They wrote to Miss Dix, offering their own suggestions and asking her to forward them to the questioner. (She never ran addresses in the paper, of course.)

Others sent money in amounts ranging from two, three, and five dollars—cash, enclosed in tablet sheets, from people who themselves were poor—to checks for a hundred dollars and more. Once she ran a touching letter from an anonymous girl telling a despairing story of how the boy she loved had betrayed her and left her without money. Having no way of reaching her, Dorothy Dix quickly published the note, and her own advice. A Canadian, reading it in a Toronto paper, sent Miss Dix ten dollars.

Dorothy promptly forwarded the ten dollars to the editor of the Toronto paper, and he ran an advertisement asking the sender to identify himself. The man called at the paper, and proved to be the father of several daughters. He asked if Miss Dix couldn't give the money to a charity that she approved, and Miss Dix did, to an organization to help girls in trouble of this kind.

Other correspondents were less generous. Some readers enclosed money in an effort to induce Dorothy to write something they could employ against their enemies. Miss Dix was always assured her answer would be used for a good purpose. "Yes, character assassination," Miss Dix would scoff, as she tossed the note into the wastebasket.

Publicity seekers offered fair-sized sums if Miss Dix would use their names—just once, please. A woman wondered if she would not say something kind about a new type of plastic surgery; her boy friend performed it quite well. He had just started in practice and if Miss Dix mentioned it, and also his name and address, the writer was sure they could get married. Certainly Miss Dix wanted to help a young couple, didn't she?

Occasionally a correspondent included ten or twenty dollars for

Flood Crest 263

"a special reading," a request that made Dorothy laugh. "They must take me for Madame Zaza!"

Year after year, until she was eighty and older, Dorothy Dix continued her phenomenal production, showing a capacity for work that often astonished her syndicate. During her entire career, she said (and here she did not conceal her newspaperman's pride), she never missed a copy deadline. Regularly, month in, month out, she made certain that a safety-deposit box in New Orleans held a three-month advance supply of her columns, "in case anything happens to me."

When she prepared to leave on a long trip, she always did another three months of columns and individual letters, to make certain that the flow would continue despite delay or illness. At times she would bring in an extra secretarial worker, and if she felt she was succumbing to an illness, she pushed herself more vigorously than ever.

While she traveled, after a busy day, she sometimes hunted up a public stenographer, called the girl to her hotel room in the evening, and dictated for several hours. In the morning before leaving for her next stop, she corrected copy and mailed it.

In one seventeen-day period—her syndicate friends have verified this fact—she managed to write ninety thousand words on fifty-two different subjects. "I trained myself early," she said, "that nothing except death or a serious operation was an excuse not to do something you ought to do. Even if death came, I wanted those columns in ahead of time!"

To a syndicate editor who fretted in 1935 about the supply of her copy before she started on vacation, Dorothy Dix wrote:

Don't worry now, or at any time in regard to my not being on time with my stuff. Not being a genius, but only an old trouper of a newspaperwoman, I realize the show must go on, and you can count on my always being there with the act. Next Thursday, as per my contract, I mail my consignment and will get back on schedule.

She did mail it, and she did get back on schedule. . . . She sel-

dom needed to write such reassurances, however. She once said with a smile that she found her syndicate managers the easiest people on earth to get along with. "I just flatter them outrageously." Like all men they need sympathy and appreciation, "and who am I to say they shouldn't get it?"

George Kearney, her Ledger Syndicate manager for many years, recalls their negotiations over contracts: "It was always a delightful occasion. I said nice things; Miss Dix said nice things. I remarked that she was the greatest syndicate feature of the day, which was pleasant to say and also true. She remarked that without the Boss (she called me that, though I was much younger) her column would hardly have done so well. True or otherwise, that was good to hear."

Then, the gambit completed, they would get down to figures. All went well until, "at precisely the right moment, those tiny eyes closed down. I'd rack my brain to make out what she was thinking, but the black velvet curtain had been drawn. Some thought she should have had an official representative or agent. She didn't need one; she did fine alone!"

In her early days with the Ledger Syndicate, in the mid-1920s, she received a guarantee of \$900 a week; this rose year by year to a basic \$1200. She received the first \$1200, the syndicate the next \$600; beyond this the split was fifty-fifty. Often, however, the take went well over \$2000 a week, and she and the syndicate benefited accordingly. For many years she received the largest salary of any syndicate contributor, man or woman, until the rise of such columnists as Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson.

The number of newspapers that subscribed to Miss Dix passed the two-hundred mark, and in a curious way her very popularity sometimes limited the figure. Great metropolitan papers, which paid high rates, could insist on exclusive rights in a wide area. The papers which took Miss Dix tended to be the bigger, more influential ones.

In 1938 Editor and Publisher made an authoritative survey showing that Dorothy's column not only took first place as the oldest feature in the newspaper field, but also as the longest continuing feature, its creator still in service. The surveyors erred, however, in

Flood Crest 265

saying her "Sunday Salad" column started in April of 1896; it had begun late in 1895. The Katzenjammer Kids was second, starting in 1897, and Beatrice Fairfax third, dating from 1900, but handled by a succession of individuals. All others began after 1900. Miss Dix had survived "the high annual death rate in the newspaper comic and text feature field," earning her way through several depressions and "the flood of new features that appeared since 1930."

For her syndicate she was a "manager's dream" in other ways. As Mr. Kearney put it: "She never complained about our editing, or the grotesque headlines some editors put on her articles; I never had a wrangle with her about royalties. If ever she learned that I added an important client she wrote me a gracious letter of thanks, always with a touch of humility in her appreciation. In every letter she included a complimentary remark; I was 'as stimulating as a cocktail' or 'one of her most outstanding memories'—sheer nonsense but awfully nice to read."

Dorothy Dix "never griped that she was not in certain towns, the usual complaint of some heady contributors." She did not send in inquiries, demanding to know why she did not appear in West Baton Rouge, Louisiana, or a suburb of Dothan, Alabama, nor did she tell how she had met editors from both of those towns at a convention and expected salesmen to go out that same day and close the deals. "Realizing that she was getting the top, she did not press, as many do. In that way they lose the wholehearted interest of the syndicate. Dorothy never did. If we needed any further incentive to work for her, she provided it. We were always 'with' her, and that means something."

Again like an old trouper, Miss Dix not only took but also asked for advice. "She remained remarkedly up with the times, with changing language and modifications in interests," said Mr. Kearney. She had said: "We can't keep our joints from getting stiff; but in heaven's name, we can keep a limber mind." Now and then, when Mr. Kearney noted a phrase that seemed dated, "I humbly called her attention to it, like an apprentice to a master, and she promptly changed it and thanked me."

In a shift of events that intrigued and amused her, Dorothy's column returned to the New York Journal. She had repeatedly

rejected offers to go back to the Journal's management, but when the Post, her New York outlet, changed owners, the Journal seized the opportunity to recapture her column. She thought it a kind of vindication. They had her again, on her terms and not theirs, and without those buckets of blood!

War, and Peace of Mind

s she approached eighty, steadily producing her column, the volume of her mail increased and remained for years at a new high level, nine hundred to a thousand and more letters a day.

Though the quantity astonished her, she understood the reasons—the shadow of war and the nation's preparation against the hazards of German and Japanese armament. America adopted the peacetime draft, dislocating the lives of hundreds of thousands of boys; families were broken up, people shifted all over the country. Defense plants rose, and the nation's social life underwent drastic change. As never before, America's young and middle-aged and old were telling Dorothy Dix their troubles.

In 1939, when earnest Americans still hoped that future wars might somehow be prevented, Dorothy Dix was one of a group of outstanding women asked what their sex could do about the matter. Her answer, highly realistic, contrasted strongly with those of most of the others:

In their hearts women are pacifists only in times of peace. When war comes they do not run up the white flag; they unfold the ban-

ners of their countries and offer up in their defense what is dearer to them than their own lives—the lives of father and brother and husband and son. In every war it is the women who are the great conscription officers, who drive the cowards into the army by their scorn, and buck up the faint-hearted to fight by their cheers.

So if it ever comes about that the nations shall dwell together in peace, the miracle will not be brought about by women's tears and prayers and preachments, but by the bitter wisdom that has come of realizing the futility of a struggle that ends in exhaustion and wherein no man can tell victory from defeat.

Then, as America moved nearer its struggle with world fascism, the country began to hear thousands of stories of draftees' dissatisfaction with their lot. The boys wondered, as they would again in 1952, why they should be kept in service when no general war had been declared. Dorothy Dix wrote a letter to a young friend at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, which was later reprinted all over the country:

I don't believe the weird tales that are going about concerning their [the draftees'] lack of morale. I don't believe the sons and grandsons of the men who fought under Washington and Grant and Lee and Pershing are going to turn cowards and quitters when their country needs them as it never has before. I don't believe the youth of today are softies who balk at any war except the boudoir and who refuse to face any powder except that manufactured by Elizabeth Arden.

Every boy of their age in the world is a chronic fault-finder and complainer. It's their age that ails them. They are voicing their disappointment in being roused from their childish dreams and finding out that life isn't a bed of roses, but a bunch of prickly cactus, and that money and position and automobiles and things are not presented to them on silver platters but have to be earned by sweat and toil and striving.

But when the time comes and the emergency arises, they do wake up and quit whining and do their part like men instead of crybabies. And that's what will happen to these lads who are proclaiming their martyrdom to the world because they have to give a

year or two to the country that has given them so much. They will sit down some day and figure out the price of freedom and pay it gladly. As for giving advice to the draftees about their love affairs, all I can say is:

Watch your step, boys, and go slow. You will worry a lot less about the sweetie you left behind you than you would over a wife, and if the girl doesn't love you enough to be faithful to you when you are off serving your country, she wouldn't make the kind of wife you would want to tie to for life. You want a teammate who will stand without being hitched.

And don't forget you will come home a changed man ... a disciplined adult who has known and experienced and felt many different little things. Maybe little sweetums won't look so good to you after you have seen other women; but anyhow, you will thank God on your knees that you still have the privilege of choice.

Don't rush into marriage because you are homesick, or some girl weeps on your shoulder and tells you how much she l-o-o-o-ves you. Take time to think it over and be certain of your own feelings . . . You can always get married, but divorce is something else, buddy.

I'm not minimizing the fact that every lad who has been called away from college or his job has made a sacrifice. But so will we all eat bitter bread before this crisis is over . . . But if we have the courage to stand up and fight for freedom, for our country and our homes, for all that makes life worth living, this darkness, this hour of travail will pass.

Though the dominant tone of this letter was deeply serious, Dorothy Dix's point of view on war marriages and the girls at home was far from the saccharine advice ladled out by others. Many boys who had grown up while their fathers, mothers, and grandfathers read Dorothy Dix were amazed that she spoke with such vigor and such understanding. One youth wrote to a newspaper: "This old girl makes sense. Are you sure she isn't younger than that picture you're running?" He and others like him brought Miss Dix a large new audience.

With Pearl Harbor, and America's entry into the war, Miss Dix responded to requests from the government and from civilian

officials to use her enormous following to help the war program. When a woman asked if there was some practical way in which a housewife could serve, Dorothy replied:

Yes. Save fats. That doesn't sound very romantic or heroic, and you will get no medals pinned on your bungalow aprons for doing it, but just now it happens that winning the war is going to depend just as much upon our giving Uncle Sam our last drop of grease, as it does upon our giving him our last drop of blood.

Edward C. Seawell, civilian official of the fats-salvage drive reported that "an almost unbelievable number of women" responded to this appeal. In another article she wrote that American girls probably had more of an obligation to render war service than men, for nowhere else in the world did women have so many civilian privileges and opportunities. Army officials were so much impressed by this argument that they sent out thousands on thousands of copies of the letter to aid in the recruiting of WACs.

One day in 1940, when she was resting on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, she approached the old Jefferson Davis home, for a long time a Confederate soldiers' home, and saw something that made her look again: rows of rockers behind a "For Sale" sign. She wrote a letter to the editor of the *Times-Picayune*:

The other day when I passed by Beauvoir, where so many old Confederate veterans spent their last days, there were two long rows of worn and shabby rocking chairs on the lawn with the "For Sale" sign upon them. No need for them any more. The barracks under the spreading live oak trees are tenantless now, their doors barred, their windows shuttered, for the old soldiers have gone on to join their comrades in that other world in which there is neither shot nor shell, nor agony of torn flesh, nor any more dying.

So the old chairs are for sale to any who have a dollar in their pockets and in their souls the memory of the war that broke the hearts of a proud people, but that now seems like the shadowy horrors of a troubled dream.

It was growing dark. A wind came up from the Gulf and gently swayed the rockers back and forth, and I swear to you they were no longer empty. They were filled with the gray ghosts of old men who bent their heads together and thrashed over, as they had done a thousand times before, the stories of the battlefields on which they had fought—Shiloh and Bull Run and Chickamauga and Vicksburg and Gettysburg and Appomattox—and they spoke in cracked voices of great adventures and told tales of heroism and suffering and sacrifice beyond belief.

And they took on their lips the names of the immortals—Lee and Stonewall Jackson and Albert Sidney Johnston and old Jubal Early and Morgan and Forrest, and a few (for it was their right, because they had been part of it) told of the last precious blood offering that the South laid on the altar of the Lost Cause when the boys . . . ran away from school to fight for their country and went singing and laughing down to death.

"Come on, come on, it is growing dark and we will be late for dinner," called my companions, and as I lingered for a last look at the old chairs they were not shabby rocking chairs any more; they were altars at which a woman might pray, or weep her heart out, and before which the lads who are now being called to the colors might kneel and make their vows of valor.

Few things she ever wrote drew so much notice as this little story.

As the war progressed Dorothy Dix's comments were sometimes barbed, often amusing. "Yes, a great deal of what's happening today" she observed, "is helping the boys' morale, but it's also ruining the girls' morals." As for the share-the-car plan, she approved it as a necessity, with an occasional reservation: "A lot of times it turns into a share-the-husband plan, too!"

Typical of the period was a note from a woman telling Miss Dix she found herself "facing a situation that is no doubt confronting many another G.I. wife." Her husband, Jim, was about to come home after two years in Europe. She had awaited him happily, and had prepared the children for his return; but then arrived a post card, addressed to her husband overseas and forwarded to his home.

It said: "Dearest Jim. Do not write any more, for Joe is coming home. I'll never forget you. Love, Mary." The wife asked Dorothy

Dix what to do: "I love my husband with all my heart and I thank God I have been true to him every second while he has been away, for I would not want him to bear the heartache that I have."

In answer, Dorothy told the wife she was asking a question to which countless women wanted an answer. Plenty of husbands besides hers had "solaced themselves from the horrors of war by having little affairs with the attractive women they met in their wanderings." In the end, of course, the correspondent would have to solve the problem for herself; but Miss Dix suggested that she bear in mind that the great majority of married men "do not take their philandering seriously," and it was perfectly possible for them to be "true in heart" to the wife while making love to another woman.

"It is ironic but true that many a man is attracted to a woman because she reminds him of his wife," Dorothy concluded. "So your husband's little affair with the post-card lady probably was only a skin-deep attack, and my earnest advice to you is to burn it up and forget it and never, never let your husband know that you ever saw it."

In wartime, as earlier, she often had to cope with the blithe self-assurance of the young. During one of her trips she gave a day's dictation to a temporary secretary, who took notes as if she did not altogether approve of Miss Dix's style. Eventually the girl lowered the pad: "You've split an infinitive."

"Is that bad?"

"Yes. I learned it in primary school, from a good teacher." The secretarial chin lifted.

"How much did your teacher get?"

"Oh, I guess seventy-five dollars a month."

"I get seventy-five thousand a year, as a minimum. Let's go on." On another occasion a bright young thing, a year out of Smith,

called to discuss "opportunities in wartime employment for women." Opening the conversation, the girl explained to Miss Dix: "I'm hoping to enter journalism, too. To start with, of course, I'd be willing to do the simple things you write. . . ."

Dorothy told the story on herself, as she did others, including one about the daughter of a hotel manager in a Deep Southern town who asked Miss Dix for an interview. Just starting on a newspaper, the girl had trouble with the organization of the story and appealed to Dorothy for help. Touched by her youth, Miss Dix got out her own typewriter and wrote most of the interview for her. As any tyro might have known, the interviewer now was lucky enough to have a sound, carefully edited article, but she could also share her by-line with the famous woman. Several days later, however, the account appeared, extensively changed, badly overwritten, and very dull. Meeting the girl again afterwards, Dorothy inquired discreetly about the story.

"I thought it was too simple," the teen-ager explained. "So I made it, made it more—well, complex."

"My child," Dorothy Dix observed, "it took me forty years to acquire simplicity. Try it sometimes."

During the war Dorothy Dix received repeated appeals to run again her ten rules for happiness. Dorothy noted: "I can't resist the flattery of anybody wanting me to be a repeater," and presented the following:

First. Make up your mind to be happy. Happiness is largely a matter of self-hypnotism. You can think yourself happy or you can think yourself miserable. It is up to you . . . Learn to find pleasure in simple things. If you can't go to the opera, you can turn on the radio. Nail on your face the smile that won't come off, and after a bit you will find that it comes there naturally.

Second. Make the best of your lot. Of course, you're not everything you want and things are not just right. Nobody is that lucky. Even the most fortunate have a lot of crumpled rose leaves under their forty mattresses of ease. There isn't a single human being who hasn't plenty to cry over, and the trick is to make the laughs outweigh the tears.

Third. Don't take yourself too seriously. Don't think that everything that happens to you is of world-shaking importance and that somehow you should have been protected from the misfortunes that befall other people. When death robs you of one you love, or you lose your job, don't demand to know of high heaven why this should have happened to you and grow rebellious and morbid over

your sorrow. We are never happy until we learn to laugh at our-

Fourth. Don't take other people too seriously. They are not so much, anyway. Don't let their criticisms worry you. You can't please everybody, so please yourself. Don't let your neighbors set your standards for you. Don't run into debt trying to keep up with the Joneses, or bore yourself to death trying to be as intelligent as the Highbrows. Be yourself and do the things you enjoy doing if you want to be comfortable and happy.

Fifth. Don't borrow trouble. You have to pay compound interest on that and it will bankrupt you in the end. It is a queer thing, but imaginary troubles are harder to bear than actual ones. There are none of us who have not lain awake at night petrified with dread of some calamity that we feared might befall us and that we felt would shatter our lives if it should occur. Generally it never happened, but if it did, it was not so bad after all and we survive it without serious injury. Enjoy today and let tomorrow take care of itself. There is no sounder adage than that which bids us not to trouble trouble till trouble troubles us. The only good that worrying ever did anyone was make him thin. It is grand for the figure but hard on the disposition.

Sixth. Don't cherish enmities and grudges. Don't keep up old quarrels. Don't remember all the mean things people have done you. Forget them. Hate is a dreadful chemical that we distill in our own hearts, that poisons our own souls. It takes all the joy out of life and hurts us far worse than it does anyone else. There is nothing so depressing as having a grudge against someone. Nothing makes a home so miserable as for the family not to be on good terms. Meeting someone you don't speak to will spoil any party. So if you have an enemy, forgive him and kiss him on both cheeks, not for his sake but simply because it is making you unhappy and uncomfortable to be stirred up in wrath against him.

Seventh. Keep in circulation. Go around and meet people. Belong to clubs. Travel as much as you can. Have as many interests as possible. Have hosts of friends. That is the way to keep yourself cheerful and jolly and thinking that this is the best of all possible worlds.

Eighth. Don't hold post-mortems. Don't spend your life brooding over the mistakes you have made or the sorrows that have befallen you. What is done is done and cannot be changed, but you have your whole future life in which to make good. Not all the tears can bring back those we have lost, but we can make life miserable for ourselves and those about us by our unavailing weeping. Quit beating upon your breast because you haven't as much money as you used to have. Don't be one of those who never get over things. Have the courage to take misfortune on the chin and come up smiling.

Ninth. Do something for somebody less fortunate than yourself. Minister to other people's trouble and you will forget your own. Happiness is a coin that we keep only when we give it away.

Tenth. Keep busy. That is the sovereign remedy for unhappiness. Hard work is a panacea for trouble. You never saw a very busy person who was unhappy.

She Saw a World Change

ear Dorothy Dix: I tried to prepare myself for news that my husband was wounded or even killed. I never expected him to come home without any interest in me or anything else . . ."

Dorothy Dix urged patience and common sense. "Your man hasn't really lost interest; he is simply trying to get over the war. Like a lot of others, he wants no responsibility, no heavy thinking for a while. And he doesn't want to go into a lot of talk about the war with a wife who can't possibly understand experiences she's never been through.

"You've built up glamorous pictures of the man and the situation—pictures entirely removed from reality. You've planned exactly how he will be, and how things will be. Well, accept him and the facts as they are; and above all, try a waiting game."

Mothers, too, were adding to postwar complications. A woman in her fifties wrote of her "terrible concern" about her bachelor son in his late twenties, who had rejoined the family after battling across Europe from the Normandy beachhead and collecting several medals en route. "He simply will not get in at midnight, the

time I always set. He stays out for hours after that. And, Miss Dix, my husband doesn't take my side, but the boy's!" Dorothy's eyes twinkled when she showed this letter.

In her amused reaction to such nonsense perhaps, lay the explanation for her continuing popularity. In the 1940s, as in earlier decades, she saw the world change around her, and she adjusted, honestly, to the change. She rejected trends she thought silly or unwise; yet she kept her mind open.

Most of her contemporaries had faded away. When Nell Brinkley died in 1944 she had largely been forgotten. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, the "poetess of passion," Ada Patterson, who covered many crime stories with Dorothy, and Winifred Black, the "Annie Laurie" of earlier years, who remained in harness for several generations, all disappeared while Dorothy continued, moving steadily in the main stream of American life.

"So many topics that were once taboo became subjects of general discussion," she said. "So many points of view, once shuddered at, ended in common acceptance." Not all changes, she admitted, were for the good. Thirty-five or forty years earlier practically every girl who married planned to stay that way. Now, all too often, she regarded marriage as a gambling proposition.

Earlier in the century, Dorothy noted, almost no girl would have admitted she drank too much; by the end of World War II many admitted it freely. As for being in love with other women's husbands and having affairs with them, the girl of the 1940s often told Dorothy that she had every inclination and intention of taking some man from his wife.

In spite of such attitudes, Dorothy found some improvements in the modern woman. She considered the present-day girl "more honest than her old-fashioned sister. She takes a straight look at herself, and glosses over little; and she doesn't cover her motives in saccharine and postures about nobility when it isn't there."

Morality, Dorothy decided, was often a matter of geography and fashions. A South Sea islander in a string of beads could be far more modest than a Park Avenue girl in a low-cut gown at a first night "on which the play was not the only thing that was opening."

Years earlier, she recalled, men used to gather around the Flat-

iron Building in New York to watch women's skirts flutter up to their ankles. As she told Beatrice Washburn: "Since then, ankles have become almost commonplace. Many of the things older people object to in the young mean just as little as that to the young themselves. A kiss no longer compromises a girl. A woman who smokes occasionally is no longer considered a demimondaine as she was a few decades back. Rouge and powder no longer signify a licentious life; they're as common as soap and water. Certainly no girl brought up in the present day and age has an excuse when she goes wrong. She knows too much about it!"

To childless couples Dorothy urged the adoption of children. She had lists of accredited agencies in the field, and of welfare organizations that could provide specific guidance.

In one instance a heartbroken father wrote her. His only son, seven, had died in an automobile accident. "Laura, my wife, just sits inside most of the day, brooding, and I find it sometimes hard to work at the office. I don't think we can have another child now; there are no signs that we will . . . Somehow I feel that no other one, ours or anybody else's could take Jerry's place. I just can't see any way out."

Deeply touched, Dorothy Dix hurried to answer: "You underestimate your own good heart and your love of children. Do this, please. Call up"—she gave the name and address of the town's welfare agency—"and make a visit together to the place they tell you about. Spend an hour among the children, and if your mind isn't made up, go back. See what happens."

Two months later she heard from the agency itself. The director thought Miss Dix might want to know that her friends had adopted a boy about the age of the one they lost.

Dorothy Dix frequently counseled unmarried mothers who might possibly have kept and supported their children to give them for adoption. She considered it better for the child to be adopted by strangers than to grow up without family security. "There is no special prejudice against an adopted child," she noted. "Nobody points a finger at it; not even the cruelty of other children finds anything to mock, for the boy may be a prince in disguise for all

they know. Such a child takes the status of the adoptive parents, ranking as their child would have done; and it has economic and social advantages that its own mother probably could not provide."

On the other hand, Dorothy Dix added, life was hard for a girl with a nameless baby. Except in rare cases in which the mother had money of her own and was a woman of exceptional strength of character and ability, the child's best interest was served by giving it up.

Over the years Dorothy Dix found that the great, common problem of wives of all types remained the unfaithful husband. The tone of the letters in such cases altered, however. Once they had been forlorn and lachrymose, with the women ready to take back the man on any pretext. The modern wife's letter usually showed no such meekness; she stood ready to deliver a strong ultimatum, or hunt a job for herself.

Nevertheless the majority of women still wanted to hold on to their husbands, and Dorothy received innumerable letters like the one from a woman whose husband, after twenty years of contented marriage, believed himself in love with a younger woman and asked for his freedom. Dorothy replied:

At middle age there comes to many men an age of indiscretion when they have a sudden yearning for romance and flirtation—the last call to the dining car, the final flare-up of youth before it sinks into age. If wives have the courage and wisdom to nurse their husbands through this second sentimental period as they do their babies through their second summers, all goes well for the balance of their lives. The husbands get over it and are glad and thankful to settle down with their wives and children, their homes unbroken and with the respect of their fellow citizens, no messy divorces on their hands and no alimony to pay . . . Just sit tight for a while.

On rare occasions she felt that a divorce was the only solution. The deciding factor, she said, was the children, and the effect of the situation on them. To a couple who wrote her in detail, explaining how much they had grown to loathe each other, she answered: "Hate is the most demoralizing of all emotions. It brings out everything that is worst in human nature. Children reared in a home in which father and mother are in eternal enmity have only

a distorted view of life; they can become as shell-shocked as any soldier." In this instance, at least, she concluded: "Better a parting of the ways than a marriage that has become no marriage at all and is ruining the lives of helpless children."

For a man who wrote her about a difficult wife she had a reassuring word: "The breed of husbands has shown greater improvement in the last few generations than any I know of." Commending him for his patience, she told him what she often said to others: "The present-day husbands, by and large, are more considerate, more just and much more pleasant to get along with. They are willing to give their wives a break. Two generations back a wife was just so much property, ordered about and disregarded; now in most cases the husband grants her rights and privileges his grandfather never dreamed of."

Later she was asked if wives were improving, too. "I'd better say so," she laughed, "or they'll be on my neck." Then she added: "I think they're more informed, more entertaining, usually, and more companionable. Whether they're trying to be better wives—that I don't know."

The question that appeared most disturbing to her male correspondents over the years was whether or not they should marry a woman with a past; and if they did, whether the woman would be faithful to them. A man in his thirties wrote that he had just learned his wife was not chaste when he married her. Of course, he confessed, he wasn't either, "but isn't it different with a man?"

Dorothy quoted the Bible: "'Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone.'" You have the words of the Great Teacher to direct you. If she forgave you, why shouldn't you forgive her? Her offense against you is no worse than yours against her. Kiss her and forget it."

Should the woman herself be very frank and tell of her earlier mistakes? Under certain circumstances Miss Dix thought it necessary for the girl to explain her past. More often her answer was no. One letter was typical:

When I was a young girl of sixteen I had a sweetheart with whom I acted indiscreetly. I am now married to the best man on earth and I worship him. I have never done anything else in my life to regret. I have been a model wife and mother, but my conscience hurts me. Shall I explain the matter to my husband?

Dorothy's answer was:

Certainly not. Don't buy your own peace of mind by forever destroying the peace of mind of your husband. There is nothing so cowardly, under some conditions, as confession. There is nothing so craven as for a woman to lay the burden of her sin on the shoulders of an innocent man and wreck his happiness by telling him something that will forever disillusion him and kill his faith in her. Lock your secret in your heart and never mention it as long as you live. Whatever wrong you did in your youth, you have atoned for by your repentance. You have earned the right to happiness. Take it, and, by your tenderness and goodness, make up to your husband for the things he does not know and should never know.

Dorothy had studied generations of American youth, and in these later years she found that too many young people were asking too much of the world.

"You're crying to heaven," she said to one girl, "because you haven't a tile bathroom for every member of the family and can't have a new car every twelve months. May I suggest to you that there are other things in life?"

A twenty-two-year-old wrote glumly of "the new problems of youth." In reply she asked: "What new problems? Youth has the same ones it always had—for the girl the problem of marrying the right man; for the boy, getting a good job, working toward a purpose. Immorality? Young stomachs react the same way to liquor as they always have. Girls that drink too much and lead casual lives end much the way they did in bygone times."

Then she received a letter from a girl of seventeen, saying that her father thought she should wait three years before she had dates. "I'll be past the prime of my youth by then," the girl protested. "Can't you say something to show him how unreasonable he is?" Miss Dix did say something:

Of course a girl of seventeen is old enough to have dates with nice boys as long as they do not interfere with her school or college work. There is no surer way of making a girl boy-crazy than to try to keep her shut away from them. It also makes her awkward and ill at ease when she manages to be with them, and she invariably idealizes them and thinks them romantic heroes to be worshiped instead of plain lads with whom to be friends.

When another parent asked her about his daughter, whom he had forbidden to have beaus or invite boys to the house, she warned him: "If you close the front door on her she will sneak out the back. How are you to know what kind of boys your daughter is associating with if you don't let them in the house to see her? Young girls are going to have dates, and they are going to places of amusement. They'll go openly if they can, secretly if they are forced to."

A boy in his mid-twenties declared: "I have fallen in love with a girl I haven't known long. She is sweet and good-looking and I would like to marry her, but how can I tell what sort of wife she will make? Give me the real dope, because marriage is for a long time in my book, and I don't want to make a mistake." To him Dorothy Dix wrote:

Dear Gus

It is generally pretty safe to go by her mother, for there you have the double effect of heredity and environment. Take a good look at her home, how it is run, whether it is neat and orderly and a cheerful place to be in, or ill kept, shabby, run-down. And her mother—has she let herself go fat and frowzy? Then it is more than likely you are seeing the way your girl will look at the same age. This is not always a sure-fire test, but sure enough to serve as a possible warning.

She took a different tack with a nineteen-year-old boy in love with a woman twelve years his senior. "I want to marry her," he informed Dorothy. "What difference does age make? I will go by your advice, Miss Dix, because I know you agree with me that nothing matters in marriage except love." The answer he received was not the one he had anticipated:

Listen, son. It is a proof of your youthfulness that you are looking for a mother instead of a wife. That is the reason you have not

given your affections to a girl of your own age. Nearly every boy's first love is a woman much older than himself; it is part of the mother complex. At nineteen you are entirely too young to marry anyone of any age.

Your judgment is not mature enough for you to risk it in the selection of a wife under any circumstances; but you would add to the hazards of the proceedings if you picked a woman so much older than you. Two or three years does not matter; twelve is too great a margin. Women age more quickly than men. When you are a young man wanting to run around and enjoy yourself, she will be an old woman who wants to sit by the fire.

Economic changes made it harder as time went on for people to marry early, Dorothy Dix thought, and this buttressed her old contention against early marriages. "A man needs more education than ever, more preparation for his job," she said. "And when he starts out he must necessarily wait longer before he can support a wife. That's an inescapable fact of today—and I don't see anything so terrible about it. Better for him and also the girl that they don't jump overnight into matrimony."

Annoyed by such remarks as this, one furious gentleman wrote her to ask how a woman of seventy-six could write about the young. (He didn't know it, but she was really eighty-six.) She replied with good humor: "Sir, I might venture to say I know as much about the young as I do about anything on earth. How? They tell me, in their letters."

"Everybody Talking about Love"

orothy Dix was the nation's great authority on love. At one time or another she answered questions on every aspect of it, her own knowledge often refreshed by the letters which came pouring in to her.

As the years went by, she became more and more convinced that many of her correspondents who wrote her about love had no idea what it was. To one of these, a young man who couldn't make up his mind whether or not he really loved his girl, she wrote with some impatience:

Love means caring for somebody more than yourself. It is putting somebody else's pleasure and happiness and well-being above your own. It is sacrificing yourself for another and enjoying doing it. It is the world being all right when someone is with you and all wrong when he or she is absent. It is knowing someone's every fault and blemish and not caring, because it's John's or Mary's. No one can define love; it just is.

In giving advice on love versus finances, Dorothy could be just as down-to-earth. When a young man and a girl wrote asking if they should start their married life on insufficient funds, she replied:

The happiest marriages are generally those in which a man makes just enough money for pleasant, comfortable living. In such cases the couple are not afraid to have a baby because they know they can support it, and the wife doesn't have to work but can stay home and build a household. They can work up in life together.

Nevertheless poverty can be as dangerous as riches. If a wife sees nothing except bills and bills, certainly there is trouble ahead—disillusion, bitter wrangles, recrimination and tears. So many tears . . . Why not wait a little while longer?

A woman of forty-one, engaged to a man of the same age, raised the question of marriage between people of different tastes:

I love him, but we usually do not care for the same things; in fact we are as far apart as the poles in our likes and dislikes . . . Still, I'm sure we love each other. Does anything else matter?

Miss Dix did not reply as the correspondent obviously anticipated:

Yes, indeed, a lot of other things matter besides love when a man and woman in their maturer years contemplate matrimony . . . Congeniality, for example, which is the very bedrock of a successful marriage . . . At forty-one, I think I would go all out for companionship in a mate, for as we get along in years it is not easy to adapt ourselves to others and change our tastes and habits. Marriage lasts for a long time, and it seems longer if you are married to someone who bores you.

Many times in her letters she stressed such congeniality as the basis of marriage. To a boy and girl in their early twenties, she suggested a test: "Don't marry unless you can sit together for three or four hours at a time and enjoy talking of things entirely removed from the subject of love. Though you may not believe it, talk of love begins to pall after marriage."

A more unusual problem was presented by a woman who signed herself "Widow in Distress" in a letter which began:

I am a woman of sixty and my husband is dead. I have fallen violently in love with my son-in-law, who is thirty-nine. This fellow and my daughter are not happy together. I have sensed it for many months. He says he loves me and would like to marry me, divorcing my daughter. I feel that my soul will not rest at ease until he is my husband. Do you think it is fair to my daughter? Wouldn't we all be happier?

Dorothy's answer showed the anger she must have felt:

You will certainly be a widow in much greater distress if you commit the folly of eloping with your son-in-law. After all, you're sixty, old enough to be this man's mother, and I urge you not to befool yourself into thinking this flare of belated passion makes you young again.

I advise you to leave your daughter's home at once—but not with your son-in-law. Flight from him, not with him, is your only salvation, and the only way to save your daughter's home and marriage, and yourself a lot of grief, and your son-in-law from making a laughingstock of himself.

No fool like an old fool, says the adage, and I think you would be wise to take that to heart.

Surprisingly often, Dorothy Dix received letters from men complaining that their wives had failed to keep pace with them mentally. As one told her:

My wife hasn't had a new idea since we were married. She reads practically nothing but the society page and the cooking columns. She isn't interested in anything outside her home. Since the first baby was born she talks about practically nothing except the children. She makes a comfortable home for me, fine meals, a well-maintained household, and she's surely faithful. But I'm bored almost beyond endurance. What can I do?

Dorothy gave him her answer:

Nothing, except take your medicine like a man and make the best of it. It is futile to hope you can change your wife's pattern, or make of her the mental companion she was never cut out to be, and cannot be no matter how much she wanted to, or how hard she tried.

For an intellectual man to marry a dull and stupid woman is one of the greatest of tragedies. What greater loneliness than for two people to spend their lives close together in body yet miles apart spiritually? But there is no turning back in life, and my advice to you is to concentrate on your wife's good points as a homemaker and mother, and find escape in a mental world of your own.

Despite the volume and variety of answers that she gave, Dorothy Dix never became convinced that her point of view was the only possible one. "I guess everybody thinks sometimes what a wonderful world it would be if only he could run it," she told a friend. "But if I ever reach the day I think I'm right about everything, promise me you'll shoot me!"

Frequently Dorothy would worry about a letter for several days before she was quite sure how to answer it. She would move it from one side of the desk to the other, cover it up for an hour, then return to it. She knew that whatever she decided might settle a life, for good or bad. There was the case of Irma, a married woman of forty-nine who was falling in love with a man twelve years her junior. Irma wrote:

I married when I was about seventeen, and my husband has been insane for sixteen years. I take care of him in the hospital and I've been seeing him each week. I've been very lonely, and this young man comes like sunlight into my life. He tells me he loves me because I have been so faithful to my husband, and says if we were married he would like me to continue my visits if I wished . . .

He is a rough sort of fellow, and we don't seem to be alike in a lot of ways. I fear I couldn't keep up with him, he is so strong. And what makes me hesitate is that he knows so many so-called sporty women. [But] I can't seem to find out anything but good about

him, tho' he rules his men with a rod of iron, and explodes when I tell him about our difference in age.

In sad understanding Dorothy Dix gave her reply:

In only a few states, Irma, is divorce granted for reasons of insanity, and there's a terrible lot of red tape to go through besides. But, being the sort of woman you are, I do not think you would take advantage of any legality that would free you from the poor stricken creature you promised to stand by "in sickness and in health till death do us part."

Moreover, even if you were free, at forty-nine you are too old to marry a man twelve years your junior. For at middle age the cards in the game of love are stacked against us. We are set in our ways. We have been to the circus and ridden on the merry-go-round and we want to settle down and rest. To marry a man twelve years younger than yourself under any circumstances would be a great risk; it is an even greater one in your case because you and the young man are so dissimilar in type. No, Irma, you had better go on being lonely. It is at least more comfortable than being sorry.

Dorothy was more amused than worried by the dilemma of a seventeen-year-old who had been "thinking seriously of marriage and needed information." For two years she had been wearing "falsies" . . . "as I am somewhat undeveloped. I am very self-conscious about it, and for this reason I back out when marriage is mentioned. Should I tell the boy I love about my false breasts beforehand, or should I get married and let nature take its course?"

Dorothy Dix curbed her sense of humor and answered seriously:

Since you love your young man, marry him. Women have always worn aids to the figure—bustles, "symmetricals" to help their legs, padded hips, tight corsets and ruffled underbodies. Don't men, perhaps your friend included, wear padded shoulders and coats tailored to give a hint of development that may not always be there?

Dorothy was less gentle with another girl who wrote to protest the way the people in her small town peered at her from behind their blinds, checked on her goings and comings, and then whispered about her. Wasn't gossip a terrible thing? she asked. Dorothy replied:

You're wrong. Gossip is an influence for good—an invisible policeman that enforces law and order, and keeps the feet of weak people on the path. We may quiet the voice of conscience, Louise, but not the voice of the neighbors. It is the fear of "they'll say" that often makes us curb our appetites and stick to standards of conduct set up by society. Think what would happen if we could do as we pleased and get away with it. There would be many more philandering husbands and wives, many more neglected children, badlykept houses, wife-beating husbands and virago wives.

Those who are down on gossip and feel the world should cover up their shortcomings are unreasonable. Why should others be more careful of your reputation than you are yourself? If you do not care enough for your good name to protect it, why demand that service of the general public? There is no chaperone so efficient as Mrs. Grundy, and the only way to escape being talked about is to be so exemplary in behavior that you are a dull subject for conversation.

The longer Dorothy Dix continued her work, the greater became the number of her male correspondents. Eventually it approached fifty per cent, partly because wives quoted her remarks to their husbands. In her earlier years the majority of her women correspondents were between twenty and forty, most of them "married or to be married or hoping to be married." Later her readership, male and female, was extended in both directions to include teenagers and those over sixty.

American youth became more articulate, and so did the older folk. She felt gratified as she saw this change, for it indicated that she had become useful to many more people. "And I'm pleased," she said, "when the day's mail runs the range from high-school essay paper to bond stationery. Too much of one or the other, and I might worry."

Now and then she received notes intended to disturb or alarm her, including threats of revenge. The mildest told her she was a silly, doddering fool, or a cynical woman who did untold harm. A man felt certain that one of her letters had led his wife to desert him; a woman accused her of advising her daughter to leave home. An angry man suggested cyanide in her coffee as just retribution for the advice she gave wives; and a woman thought such a death too merciful for a counselor so biased in favor of the men. All such letters went promptly into the wastebasket.

Each week brought scurrilous messages and obscene questions from cranks, perverts, or obviously demented people. A friend once suggested she turn these over to the police, since some of them gave addresses. "No," said Dorothy, "writing me that way may help them let off steam. And any attention may be just what they want."

She could be wounded, however, by the rare critical or sarcastic comments from young newspapermen or newspaperwomen. No matter how shallow or juvenile the letter might be, she was hurt. "I'm a working newspaperman myself, you see."

The great bulk of her correspondents reacted very differently. Many people to whom she gave advice sent her crocheted handbags, handkerchiefs embroidered with her name, books, pens, native dolls from Mexico, Sweden, France, and other countries; carefully wrapped fruitcakes; paintings, sometimes of herself; napkins and belts. Usually these gifts were accompanied by some such message as the following:

When my husband complained I spent too much time in the kitchen, you made him see how lucky he was to be married to a good cook. So I am sending you a loaf of my homemade bread that took first prize at the fair. You ought to have seen Sam's face when I got the prize.

And again:

You saved my wife and I from divorce ten years ago. She died last week and near the end she mentioned you twice. Here is a framed picture of her. If you ever feel blue, remember what you did for us.

The fact that she lived in New Orleans was unknown to some readers. Presuming that she was a native of their own town, many tried vainly to reach her through the local newspaper or telephone

company. She often received, days later, an anxious note begging her to call a certain number within the next twenty-four hours. Occasionally a conservative correspondent in a small town, having heard of the Creole city's reputation for gaiety, demanded: "What is a woman like you doing in a place like that?"

On Dorothy's desk stood a file of letters from men as well as women, asking what she could say to them about Time, their nemesis. In such instances, she explained later, she thought of her own life, for once she, too, had dreaded the onrushing years. Now she was old enough at last to know better. She wrote:

We all think of Time as our enemy. Especially do women regard it as their most malevolent foe, for does not Time rob them of their beauty? Would not most women rather be accused of a scandal than of growing old? In reality Time is our friend, our greatest benefactor. It is a philosopher's staff; it is the magic that lifts the crushing burden from our shoulders and makes smooth the rough places in life.

Even to women Time is kinder than they think. It offers itself to them as an ally instead of an adversary if they will meet it in the right spirit. For no women are so fascinating as those whom age and experience have ripened and perfected and given sophistication and taught every art of pleasing. And age gives beauty to many women who never had it in their youth. Time is a sculptor that chisels the rough features of many a girl into symmetry. Many an old woman's face is simply luminous with the goodness of her soul.

Time is the greatest solver of all our problems. All of us have difficulties that we cannot settle and that we lie awake at night and worry over wondering. How much anxiety we might spare ourselves if we could only lay our problems on the knees of Time! For when the hour comes, we find that Time has solved it all and our course is perfectly obvious.

Time brings with it the blessedness of forgetfulness. It turns the memory of hardships into piquant reminiscences. It makes our mistakes and blunders something to laugh over instead of cry over. And it is Time that is the great peacemaker. Time robs old feuds of their

enmity and old hatreds of their bitterness and makes us forgive those who have wronged us. Time taught us how senseless it was to sour our own lives with a grudge.

Best of all Time is the great consoler. When we lose those we love no words, no sympathy can lighten our sorrow. Nothing can help us but Time. Time brings us fresh interests, other joys, gives us work that absorbs us, turns the grief that rended us into the sorrow that can be borne.

Blessed be Time that heals us.

Age and Consolation

Surely the consolation prize of age is in finding out how few things are worth worrying over, and how many things that we once desired, we don't want any more.

Dorothy Dix

lmost anything she had once wanted, Dorothy Dix could now have. In her eighties, she could command practically any favor of those who knew her. "The most loved woman in the world," someone said of her, and it did not seem a far-fetched description.

In at least one case she learned that she had counseled different generations of the same family. A young woman, leaving the WAVEs at the end of World War II, had asked what future career Miss Dix might suggest. Dorothy recommended work as a laboratory technician, and the girl wrote later that she had followed the advice, successfully, and added that she had learned, by accident, that her grandmother had written to Dorothy for advice forty-five years before.

When native Orleanians arranged to show visitors the town, from the French Quarter to the river front, the strangers usually announced: "We want to see two things most of all—Dorothy Dix and Huey Long." Following Huey's death, the request was only for Miss Dix.

Even Burma-Shave used her name. Riding one day in North Carolina, Dorothy was startled by a procession of signs which read:

Love and Whiskers Do Not Mix— Don't Take Our Word, Ask Dorothy Dix.

As another measure of her celebrity, her syndicate had trouble whenever it changed the photograph which appeared with her column. She herself had never liked her pictures. "They make me look like a large, blond Amazon, whereas I'm small and meek." Reluctantly she consented at intervals to the use of a new picture and each time there was a flood of protest. One woman wrote: "It's almost like trying to pray to a new God!"

When the Philadelphia Ledger, with which her syndicate was connected, suspended publication in 1942, there was keen bidding for the Dix feature. After nearly twenty years with the Ledger she signed with a new agency, the Bell Syndicate, and from then on her income went up to \$90,000 or more a year.

One Mardi Gras thousands of people mistook someone else for her. The scene was the elaborate reviewing stand of the Boston Club on Canal Street, where the Queen of Carnival and her maids were sitting in the place of honor. "There's Dorothy Dix," someone called. "Over there, with the black hat." In a moment most of the attention had shifted to a white-haired woman on the left side of the reviewing stand. After the parade was over, the woman in the black hat found hundreds of people pressing around her, trying to shake her hand. Police helped her to her car, but before they could clear the running board a teen-age girl thrust her head inside the car window and sobbed: "Miss Dix, I've lost my boy friend. What shall I do?"

The stranger in the black hat replied: "I'm not Dorothy Dix—but get another one!"

When she was told about the incident the next day, Dorothy was asked what she thought of the mistake. "Oh, all old ladies look alike," she shrugged. As for the advice, she added: "I'd probably have said the same thing. And judging by what I saw yesterday, elsewhere, I've no doubt it's working."

The greatest of her consolations in her later years, she said, was the friendship of men and women of all ranks and ages; in these companionships she delighted more and more as time passed. She spoke warmly of people "who know me well, but like me still."

She had developed to a high point her gift of felicitous expression. To Colonel and Mrs. Elbert Lyman she wrote: "May God be as good to you during the New Year as I would if I were God." Of a doctor who had been kind to her she wrote: "Every time I look at his back I expect to see a hump in his coat where his wings are sprouting." To Mrs. Allen H. Vories she expressed gratitude for a shawl; it would be "invaluable on chilly nights when you need something around you and are too old for arms."

Receiving a set of traveling bags, she replied: "Thank you for the lovely bags for my nighties and panties and what the fashion writers call 'intimate garments,' though God knows there's nothing that a woman has concealed about her person now. But anyway, if I ever travel again, N. P. (Knees Permitting) I shall flaunt my silken duffle bags in everybody's face." She wrote these gay words at eighty-three.

When she had her apartment redone she told delightedly how she had "put that Chinese wallpaper on the bathroom that I've been trying to get, and it looks so grand I'm thinking of giving a party in it. True, the space is limited . . . I'll save a place for you if the affair comes off." When she tasted smoked turkey prepared by Jim Howe, an old newspaper friend, she wrote that it "tastes like turkey ought to taste when it goes to heaven."

To Mrs. Stanley Arthur, who had worked long hours planting a rose garden, she dispatched this advice: "Rest, and remember what happened to Eve in the garden—a dangerous place for women." Thanking her close friend, Matilda Gray, for a gift of giant pears, she observed: "If Eve seduced Adam with an apple, think what she could have done with one of those Oregon pears. I tremble to think of it. We probably would not only have been evicted from Eden, but out of the world."

Throughout her life she remained scornful of overeducated fools. In Yucatan she was entertained by a group of pompous intellectuals, and wrote afterward: "Never had so much brains been served

at any meal before. Some I thought a bit scrambled." On the same trip a gushy introductory speaker announced that he was determined to kiss Dorothy Dix so that he could tell his children he had. After a moist salutation, she responded to his remarks: "Where I came from, the gentlemen may kiss, but they don't tell."

In the luxury of age she indulged in more frankness of a personal kind. Telling how friends announced that their relatives were descending on them "for a nice long visit," she commented: "God forbid it should happen to me." Of an acquaintance in Florida, she said that family callers devoured her. Yet no aunt or great-aunt could have been more engrossed in her young relatives.

In these days she did not try to conceal two allergies—music of any kind except the simplest folk songs, and corsages. Rejecting tickets to a symphony concert, she explained: "I'm not up to it. To me it's just a confusion of sound." She never could sing, and when she hummed, nobody recognized the tune. A secretary heard her one day from the next room and rushed in to see what was the matter. Later she said: "She'd been trying to sing to herself; I thought she was crying."

Asked to serve on a musical committee of the Orleans Club, Dorothy declined with the statement: "There's nothing short of murder I wouldn't do for you, except mixing up with a musical outfit. There my courage fails me, for I am like the man who knew only two tunes. One was 'God Save the King' and the other wasn't. So please excuse me, and put me on the dishwashing team or something really in my line."

As for flowers, she approved of them, as in earlier years, in the ground, "not with their feet chopped off." Protesting when people tried to pin them on her, she gave various reasons: "They die on me; I wither 'em." Or she pointed to marks left by corsage pins: "They ruin my dress." Her sister-in-law, Daisy Meriwether, recalled that to Dorothy a corsage was like a firecracker. "She touched it and dropped it." This idiosyncrasy frequently caused embarrassment to family and friends. Ultimately Dorothy worked out a technique. She accepted the flowers, then gave them to the nearest woman. Sometimes, when this ruse was unsuccessful, she would deposit the corsage a short distance off, on a napkin if she were at a

dinner party. "This way I can see them better than if they were on me."

In her eighties she felt she should be allowed to indulge her likes and dislikes. A North Carolina resort hired musicians at mealtime, and she commented: "Why good food should be ruined by music is one of the crimes I've never been able to understand. It's an exhibition of sadism, I guess." After a house party she confided privately that she would accept no more such invitations. "I'm convinced they are something left over from the Inquisition, and I'm so tired of being pleasant that I want to go out and yell and kill somebody, just to show what my natural disposition is."

She took delightedly to gay colors, figured prints, and flowered hats that the arbiters of fashion thought unsuited to her type and age. She understood how they felt, and went on dressing as she wished. Touching a friend's dark blue dress, with a single line of white, she said, a bit wistfully: "You look exactly the way my brother Ed tells me I should. But I prefer this." She indicated her green-and-red frock. "It's me, you see."

She insisted also on living alone. Her brother's apartment, below hers, turned out to be too near for comfort. The floor between was so thin that she complained: "We can practically hear one another change our minds." Eventually she and brother Ed had soundproofing installed.

Repeatedly the family had suggested a woman companion or, at the least, a servant to remain with Dorothy at all times. "I won't have it; I want privacy," said she. "I don't want anybody tagging after me."

She was always eager for a party, even though she might be physically unfit for it. Sometimes, when she did not feel well, her brother downstairs opposed her going out. An acquaintance, coming to get her, was astounded when New Orleans' First Lady greeted her with finger to her lips: "Sh... I don't want them to hear us below." Together they slipped away quietly.

Much later that evening Dorothy reluctantly said to her hostess: "I've been having a wonderful time, but I've got to go home. Ed won't like it." Her eyes had the gleam of a mischievous teen-ager's, though she was then eighty-four.

She continued to finesse her age, letting it be "understood" she was ten years younger than she was. This was not simply a matter of vanity, she explained. "I'm not a dodo, but too many people may think so if they knew. Who wants advice from great-grandma?" She laughed at the thought and at herself as well. And when she said she was "in the neighborhood" of a certain age, she smiled. "A neighborhood can be a big one."

But eventually, she began to admit everything. At the Petit Salon, a friend inquired over coffee: "Dorothy I saw that new picture in the paper. How old are you, darling?"

Dorothy's small round face crinkled in a smile: "Hazel, for a long time I was seventy. But just the other day I decided to jump. Now I'm eighty-six." A few months later she wrote to another friend: "I've gotten so old now I don't mind celebrating the event, and that marks the height of philosophic calm for a woman."

She still debated the question of retirement, and she told her syndicate how she felt. But then she remembered what Ernie Pyle had said when she told him she was feeling "awfully tired" about her work. Pyle guessed that she would be a great deal more tired if she gave up. She concluded that he was right, and again put the idea out of her mind.

CHAPTER 26

"Worth the Price"

It is more important to do what you want to do than to take care of yourself . . . which is probably why I now have rheumatism and a bum knee. But it was worth the price.

Dorothy Dix

uring all her life she had pushed herself, in her own words, "beyond the limits of my strength." Intermittently she had rested, then resumed her work as resolutely as ever. Whatever the syndicate asked for, she supplied, giving more copy, extra copy, longer or shorter copy. And still, she conceded, she did it primarily because she enjoyed the work.

"You know," she once said casually, "It's nice that these people pay me the way they do. It means so much to me, I might do it for nothing!"

Nevertheless the years were leaving their mark upon her. She developed arthritis; after a fall her knees gave her endless pain. Then the doctors decided she had diabetes and could eat no more sweets. Annually she came down with "general disturbances." Yet equally regularly she managed to conquer, if not her diseases, at least their effect on her.

Insistently she tried new remedies. In Memphis she found a specialist who "thinks no more of making a new joint for you than I

would of making a cupcake." There she was dieted, stretched out with a six-pound weight, "first boiled in hot water, then frozen with ice." After the medical men worked strenuously over her knee, she sent out a post card saying: "Dull and wearisome . . . Not even a thrill in having your leg pulled by a doctor."

After that she claimed she had exhausted materia medica. "But it sort of takes my mind off my pains to go from doctor to doctor, on the same principle that having fleas distracts a dog from worrying over being a dog, as David Harum said." Describing a new treatment, "which they assure me will leave me young and slim and full of sex appeal," she observed: "I regret to report that so far I am still wearing the same corsets and nobody is following me on the street."

At one point she protested to a fellow sufferer, brother Ed, "We spend so much time to get well, and what's the result? We're no good to anybody." Ed's wry humor came to their rescue: "We're a great comfort to the doctors." Thereafter she quoted him with glee. Recovering from an illness, she wrote Matilda Gray that she felt fit only for "crawling out in the back yard and eating worms." But when Matilda's next letter came, Dorothy responded swiftly: Sick or not sick, she wanted all the news and gossip, especially gossip, saved for her, and how soon could they meet at Galatoire's?

The family continued close together. Her two Meriwether nephews lived in houses adjoining hers. Brother Ed was a born patriarch and loved his family around him, she said, "and I'm the same way." Ed went up to see her every day, often several times. Though she visited Ed's family in the apartment below, she did not do so regularly. "I think it's because my sister-in-law and I respect each other's privacy that we get along so well," she said. And, though alone at night, she had a speaking tube in the hallway, connecting with Ed's apartment.

In this period she slept fitfully, partly as a result of her arthritic pains. She coped with her insomnia by repeating poems she had memorized; as she had anticipated, she was "living on my past."

Annually she headed for Asheville, North Carolina, where her nephew Huntington lived. At Grove Park Inn and Battery Park Hotel she spent months of repose, and this beautiful region became her favorite vacation spot. Her days of foreign travel were over; she moved largely between New Orleans and Asheville, with stops in Illinois, where her sister Mary lived. In Asheville she joked about the widows all around her: "This hotel should be called the Widows' Haven, for it is filled with rich ladies who have passed into a sort of Elysium of bliss in which their husbands are housebroken, or dead, their children married or out on their own; they have plenty of money, good clothes and nothing to do but gad about and eat too much." She concluded: "I should know, as I am one of them."

There Dorothy sat, gazing at mountains, the green drifting into blue, the blue into a distant smoky gray. She "sucked her thumbs," and wanted only to be left alone, she said.

The year 1944 brought sorrow. Her sister Mary and Mary's husband, George Patch, died within a short time of each other. For some years Mary had suffered a variety of illnesses, and had often gone to Dorothy for help. Now Dorothy wrote in loving memory:

She was one of the clinging, timid, loving women who always have to have someone to lean on, and so, although she was only two years younger, she always seemed like my child to me. And somehow we miss those who are dependent on us more than we do the strong who can stand alone . . . She was very dear to me, but she was such a sufferer that death came to her as a friend.

With brother Ed, Dorothy took Mary back to Tennessee, to place her beside her husband, who had been taken there only three months earlier . . .

Later that year, crossing a street in Asheville, Dorothy was knocked down by a bus. Though she missed serious injury by a small margin, she had to spend weeks in painful recuperation, nursing a variety of minor ailments. Letters arrived from all over the country, and telegrams and telephone calls. She left the hospital with a heightened realization of the affection the nation felt for her.

Though Dorothy returned to work, even before her accident she had found it hard to go on. "A column a day is an insatiable mon-

ster that is always devouring me," she confided. "I am a creaking door that keeps hanging on . . . but I keep on working to stop from getting sorry for myself."

In May of 1946 Joseph Agnelli, general manager of the Bell Syndicate, urged her to sign a new contract. Replying, she expressed her pleasure in knowing that he wanted her to continue. Though she renewed the agreement, she reminded him that she "still wanted to step down and out when I begin to slip, for I have a perfect horror of being a has-been."

Two years later, as the time approached for another contract, she reported that she had suffered an acute attack of bronchitis. Though better, she found that "being so near the Pearly Gates has made me wonder if you and Mr. Wheeler should not be giving serious thought to whether little Dolly shouldn't retire . . . There comes a time when the dance is over, and our place is a nice comfortable seat in the back row."

Mr. Agnelli went to New Orleans and an agreement was reached. She would sign again with the stipulation that some of her reserve columns and earlier columns be used if she "lost her rabbit's foot."

By 1948 Dorothy found all work increasingly difficult. She would hunch forward in her chair for half an hour at a time, trying to dictate, then murmur in a low voice: "I can't think. I can't think." Her secretary, Clare Ryan, stood by in these times of frustration, doing everything she could to help. Her friends, too, became alarmed when Dorothy began to forget names. She even forgot that of "the pretty girl that works for me. You know who I mean." She meant Mrs. Ryan, who had been with her for twenty years.

She became the occasional prey of less cheerful moods. She often wrote of an old Negro helper who lived on and on until she complained that "the Lord forgot her." Moreover, Dorothy's long-time companion, Helen Pitkin Schertz, had died after a lingering illnes, and Dorothy expressed fear that the same thing might happen to her. She preferred to go in harness.

But finally she could stay in harness no longer. She had come close to a breakdown, which doctors said resulted from "working too hard and too long—fifty-six years without a break." In a note to Huntington Patch in April of 1949 she said: "All of a sudden

I realized that I had gotten to the end of my ticker, and that I was so tired I couldn't think or walk or even talk coherently. So I threw myself on the mercy of my syndicate." Mr. Agnelli and his associates agreed to let her "just write a little when I felt like it and use some stuff I'd already laid up for a rainy day."

Earlier that April she told Mrs. Arthur and Mrs. Ryan of her decision, and gave them a full year's severance pay. For her and for them, after so long a time together, it was an occasion for tears. The syndicate drew for a time on her earlier columns, and they showed no sign of being dated. Then Muriel Nissen, Mrs. Joseph Agnelli, took over the work, to continue it along the lines laid out by Dorothy Dix.

For a full year Dorothy had her time largely to herself, for rest and reading, and an occasional luncheon or party. Though she rejected most invitations to social affairs, she felt hurt when she heard of a newspaper party to which she had not been invited. "I've always liked them more than any other kind," she told George Healy of the *Picayune*.

Her hearing grew worse, and as her sight dimmed she realized that she, who had devoured everything in print, was no longer able to do much reading. But as she had planned, she had her memories of those long travels—the sight of palm trees against the sun, the sound of distant singing in the desert, a donkey ride in India . . .

One of her last letters, written January 16 of 1950 to Mr. Agnelli of the Bell Syndicate, told of her illness and her humble acceptance of her fate. Her arthritis made even a few steps "something left over from the Inquisition . . . Something seems to have gotten wrong in my head, as when I start to say even the simplest thing I frequently can't remember what it was."

Her brother and sister-in-law watched over Dorothy with a concern they tried to hide from her. At night, as she told friends, she sometimes got up to soak herself in hot water to ease her rheumatic pains. The sound was heard in the apartment below, and solicitously her brother would rouse himself, to listen until he made sure she had gone back to bed. "He shouldn't do that," Dorothy said, but it was a comfort to know he did.

On April 17 of 1950, about 10:00 P.M., Ed went up to say good

night. Her voice seemed a bit unclear; otherwise she was well. At 7:30 in the morning her maid arrived and soon afterward ran to the downstairs apartment; Miss Dix was sitting in her chair, slumped over and fully dressed. The maid had tried to rouse her, unsuccessfully . . . The doctor was called and Dorothy was taken to Touro Infirmary. She had suffered a stroke at the desk before which she had worked for so many years. She had been stricken, after all, in harness.

She remained at the hospital for twenty-one months, unable to move the lower part of her body, her mind sometimes clouded. As she sat in a wheel chair, her feet off the floor, she looked, as one Orleanian remembers, "like a little white doll—neat, freshly dressed, and nicely combed, and more or less content."

She recognized some people; others, although she had known them for years, appeared to be strangers. She had trouble in recalling names, and she craftily evaded questions on such matters. When brother Ed appeared at the door of her room, a nurse asked: "Who is he?"

Dorothy Dix gave a knowing look. "Oh, a relative."

"What's his name?"

The white eyebrows rose. "The same as it's always been."

In spite of pain and boredom and uncertainty, she retained her sense of humor.

One day a hospital attendant brought in a vase and said with an unctuous smile: "Look at them. Aren't they"—he spoke with emphasis—"pret-ty flow-ers?"

The black eyes lighted. "Oh, I thought they were a bunch of Presbyterians!" And that stopped that.

With her friend, Dr. George Hardin, she talked of her childhood in Tennessee and her love of horses. Overhearing her, a temporary nurse gushed: "I'm crazy about horses, too." When the intruder left, Dorothy shot a sly glance at George Hardin. "Doesn't know a horse from a cow." And laughter rang through the infirmary halls.

She died quietly on a Sunday afternoon, December 16, 1951, shortly after she had reached the age of ninety. For several days the family had expected it, and a relative who watched at her bedside

saw the black eyes slowly lose their glow, and then the flickering light had gone.

That day press associations sent out bulletins, and newspapers in most nations of the world carried full stories of the life of this woman who had been born ninety years earlier on the Kentucky-Tennessee border. In Metairie Cemetery waited a new tomb of granite, one of the above-ground vaults in the New Orleans tradition. The family planned a simple, private burial service, limited to a few who had been close to her.

On the day of the rites a poor couple arrived at the funeral home with their fifteen-year-old son, to find the coffin closed.

"I never saw her, not once," said the man, and suddenly he was weeping. "I read her day in, day out. I guess I picked my wife, here, by what Dorothy Dix said, and the Lord knows we brought up this boy the same way. I'm a working man. I took this afternoon off and gave up my pay to be here. I just wanted to say, 'Thank you, Miss Dix.'"

cores of Dorothy Dix's friends, former associates and connections in New Orleans, New York, Asheville, and various parts of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky, assisted in making available hundreds of her personal letters, memoranda, articles, and related materials. Others in these and additional places gave generously of time and information, providing recollections and incidents of all phases of her life. Particular thanks are due:

A. Huntington Patch, her nephew, of Asheville, for his swift and understanding help in answering question after question and in lending innumerable Dorothy Dix items which he collected over a period of years; and Mrs. Patch, for her similar aid.

Mrs. B. F. Amot and Mrs. Edwin Wright Inslee, both of New York, for incidents and other data dealing with her New York days.

Mrs. Matilda Geddings Gray of Lake Charles, Louisiana, for many letters and recollections.

Mr. and Mrs. John S. Kendall and Billy Steele, of New Orleans, who remembered so clearly her first New Orleans newspaper days.

Mrs. Florence Kane Reynolds, Mrs. Frances Bryson Moore, and Stanley C. Arthur, of New Orleans, for their painstaking counsel and reading of the manuscript.

Mrs. Cecil Guy Robinson, Mrs. A. B. Dinwiddie, Mrs. Cyril Ryan, Miss Vera Morel, Mrs. Judith Hyams Douglas, Mrs. Hamilton Polk Jones, Colonel and Mrs. Elbert J. Lyman, Dr. George Hardin, Mrs. Marcus Feingold, Mr. and Mrs. Clarence C. Henson, and Mrs. Herrick Lane, all of New Orleans.

Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Meriwether, her brother and sister-in-law, of New Orleans, for their courteous and friendly assistance in checking factual points.

Miss Mary Wing Tebo, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Vories, Mrs. Jefferson D. Hardin, Jr., Mrs. Ernest Reidel, Mr. and Mrs. Grenville D. Bentley, Miss Jessie Tharp, Mrs. Eberhard P. Deutsch, Mrs. George Frierson, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Lieutaud, and Miss Mary Soule, all of New Orleans.

Leonard K. Nicholson, chairman of the board of the *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans, and George W. Healy, Jr., editor, for many acts of generous co-operation; and George Chaplin, editor of the New Orleans *Item*, for other friendly help.

James P. Howe of Canyon, California, for relating many incidents of her New York days.

Waldo Pitkin of New Orleans, who made available the letters and other data of his aunt, Mrs. Helen Pitkin Schertz; the late Meigs Frost, who was Dorothy Dix's favorite New Orleans newspaperman; Mrs. Flo Field and Dr. Rudolph Matas, both of New Orleans; Mrs. Maud O'Bryan Ronstrom of the Times-Picayune, and Mrs. Bessie Shields Fourton of New York.

George F. Kearney, editor of the Ledger Syndicate, Philadelphia, for letters, recollections, and answers to questions over a period of months; John N. Wheeler, chairman of the North American Newspaper Alliance, New York, and Joseph Agnelli, of New York, manager of the Bell Syndicate, for similar help.

Warren Gilmer, nephew of George Gilmer, and Mrs. Gilmer, of New Orleans, for early recollections of their kinsman.

The late Mrs. Charles F. Buck, Jr., Mrs. Paul F. Jahncke, Mrs. Hugh Vincent, Mrs. Rudolph S. Hecht, Mrs. R. G. Robinson, Mr.

and Mrs. Edgar Stern, Miss Louise Guyol, Miss Catherine B. Dillon, G. William Nott, Miss Angela Gregory, Mrs. A. B. Donnes, Mr. and Mrs. Clarke Salmon, Mrs. Anne Barton Gihon, Mrs. Will Branan, and Mrs. St. Denis Villere, all of New Orleans, and Mrs. Lydia Wickliffe of Baton Rouge.

Stanley Horn and Dr. Alfred Leland Crabb, Nashville; the late Keats Speed, New York; Marion Meriwether, Nashville; Myra Mason Lindsey, New York; Mrs. Harris Dickson, Jackson, Mississippi; T. M. Deaton, Memphis; Nelle Brooke Stull, Elyria, Ohio; Lee Meriwether, St. Louis; Mrs. Leah Heidenreich, Port Gibson, Mississippi; Gwen Bristow, Los Angeles; John Ritchie, Charlottesville, Virginia; W. S. Wetterau, Nashville; James Kilgallen, New York.

P. L. Campbell, librarian of the New York Journal-American, who was uniformly helpful, and Martin Dunne of the editorial department, author of a forthcoming study of Nell Brinkley, who aided in the New York phases.

Dr. and Mrs. Alton Ochsner, Mrs. James P. Ewin, and Mrs. Charles E. Meriwether, all of New Orleans; Mrs. Lee Baker, Los Angeles; Mrs. James Robinson, Florence, Alabama; Foard Harris, county court clerk, Clarksville, Tennessee; Homer Croy, New York; and Gene Fowler, Los Angeles.

Mrs. Beatrice Washburn Jones of the Miami Herald, who wrote early and perceptively of Dorothy Dix's role as a syndicate figure.

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George E. Simmons, professor of journalism, Tulane University, New Orleans; Dr. Garland Taylor, librarian of the Howard Tilton Memorial Library of Tulane; and Marguerite D. Renshaw of Tulane's reference department.

John Hall Jacobs, librarian of the New Orleans Public Library; George King Logan, assistant; Marguerite Ruckert, Ruth Renaud, Gladys Peyronnin, and others of the staff.

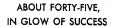
James J. A. Fortier, director of Louisiana State Museum; Mrs. Ruth Campbell, Louisiana Room, Louisiana State University Library; and Miss Charlotte Capers, acting director, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

ABOUT TWENTY-ONE, JUST BEFORE MARRIAGE





ABOUT TWENTY-FOUR, AS UNHAPPY YOUNG WIFE









HIGHLIGHTS
IN THE LIFE OF

Dovothy

Dix

ABOUT SIXTY-FIVE, IN HAWAII





AT EIGHTY-SEVEN, IN HAPPY SERENITY





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